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SERMONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

AT THE VICTORIA

REV. JOHN HAMPTON, M.A.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY'S,

JOSEPH WHITE, D.D.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON:

Printed by J. C. and J. B. M. 1840.

of the Holy Scriptures and Christian
Faith, their Principles,
and their Effects.

SERMONS

PREACHED AT

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

By the Author.

AT THE REQUEST

OF THE FACULTY

REV. JOHN HAMPTON, M.A.

CHURCH-CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY

JOSEPH WHITE, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY, AND OF THE
HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON.

Printed by J. C. and J. Richardson, and
by W. and A. Wood, in Pall Mall.

1811.

*A Comparison of Mahometism and Christianity
in their History, their Evidence,
and their Effects.*

SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR 1784,

AT THE LECTURE

FOUNDED BY THE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

LATE CANON OF SALISBURY.

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JOSEPH WHITE, D. D.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH,
AND ARCHBISHOP LAUD'S PROFESSOR OF ARABIC.

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Nov. 27, 1811.

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the subsequent ones.

Nov. 27, 1814.

EXTRACT

FROM THE

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON,

CANON OF SALISBURY.

—“ I give and bequeath my Lands and Estates
“ to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the Uni-
“ versity of Oxford for ever, to have and to hold all and
“ singular the said Lands or Estates upon trust, and to
“ the intents and purposes hereinafter mentioned; that
“ is to say, I will and appoint, that the Vice-Chancellor
“ of the University of Oxford for the time being shall
“ take and receive all the rents, issues, and profits
“ thereof, and (after all taxes, reparations, and necessary
“ deductions made) that he pay all the remainder to the
“ endowment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be
“ established for ever in the said University, and to be
“ performed in the manner following:

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first Tuesday in
“ Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly chosen by the Heads
“ of Colleges only, and by no others, in the room ad-
“ joining to the Printing-House, between the hours of
“ ten in the morning and two in the afternoon, to preach
“ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year following,
“ at St. Mary's in Oxford, between the commencement
“ of the last month in Lent Term, and the end of the
“ third week in Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon either of the
“ following subjects—to confirm and establish the Chris-
“ tian Faith, and to confute all heretics and schismatics—

“ upon the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures—
 “ upon the authority of the writings of the primitive
 “ Fathers, as to the faith and practice of the primitive
 “ Church—upon the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour
 “ Jesus Christ—upon the Divinity of the Holy Ghost—
 “ upon the Articles of the Christian Faith, as compre-
 “ hended in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight Divi-
 “ nity Lecture Sermons shall be always printed, within
 “ two months after they are preached, and one copy
 “ shall be given to the Chancellor of the University, and
 “ one copy to the Head of every College, and one copy
 “ to the Mayor of the City of Oxford, and one copy to
 “ be put into the Bodleian Library; and the expence of
 “ printing them shall be paid out of the revenue of the
 “ Lands or Estates given for establishing the Divinity
 “ Lecture Sermons; and the Preacher shall not be paid,
 “ nor be entitled to the revenue, before they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person shall be
 “ qualified to preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons,
 “ unless he hath taken the Degree of Master of Arts
 “ at least, in one of the two Universities of Oxford
 “ or Cambridge; and that the same person shall never
 “ preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons twice.”

S E R M O N I.

MATT. xi. 19.

Wisdom is justified of her children.

THE chapter in which these words occur opens with a concise relation of the Baptist's message to our Saviour; which he sent, probably, not so much to confirm his own conviction, as to gratify the pious curiosity, and to remove the modest scruples, of his followers. Then follow the attestation which our Lord bore to the character of John, and the reflections he made on the treatment which each of them received from a race of men, whose jealousy made them suspect, and whose perverseness disposed them to counteract, the best methods that divine Wisdom had adopted for their reformation. A temper of mind so destitute of candour, so incapable of solid improvement, so predetermined to resist the most salutary counsels of Heaven, was, by way of exposing it more effectually to contempt, compared to that wayward folly which is frequently ob-

servable in children, whose obstinacy no corrections can control, and whose complacency no condescensions can win. If you pipe to them, they are too sullen to dance ; and if you mourn to them, they are too gay to lament. The comparison, though mortifying, was deserved ; and, that it might not lose its aim, our Lord made a particular application of it to the Jews. He informed them, without a figure, that they were the perverse children whom he had more immediately in view ; and that it was their infatuated perverseness which the comparison was designed to illustrate and expose : for such contrary appearances did it assume, that neither the exemplary austerity of John, nor the more gracious familiarity of Christ himself, could either conquer its dislike, or conciliate its esteem. Did John lead an abstemious life, and sequester himself from the cares and amusements of the world, as a course which seemed most favourable to the solemnity of his office, and which, as it removed him at a distance from temptation, promised to secure his character from the petulance of ridicule, and the malignity of reproach ? With what eyes did the Jews behold his conduct, and what interpretation did they put on it ? By supposing that

he had a devil, or was under demoniacal influence, they thought such unnecessary severity could be easily accounted for. They gazed, perhaps, some with stupid admiration, and some even with contempt, at the rigour of the hermit, but turned a deaf ear to the warnings of the preacher.

Did our blessed Lord adopt a mode of behaviour in some respects different from the very austere habits of the Baptist's life? Did he possess more of the social qualities of human nature? Was he more accessible, and did he mix with the world and converse with mankind with less distance and restraint? What effect had his amiable and condescending manners on the people, who had been offended at the strict self-denial which his messenger had voluntarily imposed on himself? Was their good opinion conciliated? No. Their perverse humour was always predominant, when their reformation was the object; and, in order to evade the end, they vilified the means. Thus they traduced our blessed Lord *as a glutton and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners.*

After these reflections on the inconsistency of their judgment, and the stubbornness of their dispositions, particularly as dis-

covered against himself, and the religion which he came to establish, he adds, *But wisdom is justified of her children.* As if he had said, “ Though the generation to which I am sent to disclose the first messages of grace is so eager to misinterpret my doctrines, and to censure my conduct; yet there are those who are ready to bear their testimony in my favour, from evidence too clear to be contradicted, or even to be doubted. Wisdom has its sincere advocates; and they who are best acquainted with its principles, and most susceptible of its spirit, are best qualified to defend it. The nearness of their relationship puts them in a situation the most auspicious to conviction: and if in proportion to their knowledge of its evidence be their zeal in its support, and their concern for its interests, in spite of the cavils of the unbelieving, and the persecutions of the cruel, they will afford a testimony in its behalf that will justify it to future generations.

By the term *wisdom* in the text our blessed Lord meant, as some suppose, HIMSELF; who is in the highest sense deserving of the appellation, as being the WORD and WISDOM of God, in whom *are hidden all the treasures of knowledge*; and who is *the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

Others are of opinion, that the expression was meant to convey a sublime idea of the character of his gospel: which is in truth the illustration of divine wisdom, and the system of that knowledge, which can alone *make us wise unto salvation* ^a.

A gospel so divine in its original, so excellent in its design, and so beneficial in its effects, *as it was worthy of all acceptation*, so did it gain many to espouse its interests, whose conduct brought no discredit on the cause they stood forward to defend. The children of wisdom have frequently justified it by arguments too strong for its enemies to confute: and thousands in the pains of death, and amidst the tortures of crucifixion, instead of falling from it, have adhered to it with firmer hopes, and fonder attachment; and breathed out their souls in attestations to its truth, and in prayers for its prosperity.

Nor has wisdom been denied the testimony of enemies: a testimony, of which in-

^a Wetstein has concisely and emphatically explained the word *ἐδικαιώθη*—*Justa pronunciata est atque absoluta sapientia divina a cultoribus suis*. So when John, with the clearest precision, and in a tone of the weightiest authority, had described the characteristic proofs of his own mission, the people and the publicans *ἐδικαίωσαν τὸν Θεόν*; acknowledged the righteous interposition of God, and the propriety of the evidence which shewed him to have interfered; and were baptized with the baptism of John,

deed, it did not stand in need; but which, being extorted by the irresistible force of truth, may well be esteemed as a confirmation of its general evidence: since they whose wish and whose interest it was to decry it, yet were compelled, if not to receive it wholly, yet to acknowledge it in part; and thus, like Pilate, pronounced him *righteous*, whom they condemned; and, like Judas, confessed him *innocent*, whom they betrayed.

Though God, according to his promise, has always *had a seed to serve him*, and which might be *accounted as his peculiar generation*; men who have considered the success of religion as intimately connected with their own well-being, and who have therefore promoted it with a zeal and ardour in some degree proportioned to its importance; yet to the primitive ages of Christianity must we turn our eyes for examples of the most heroic fortitude, and the most disinterested attachment. Other examples may illustrate, but these convince. Modern piety and zeal may edify and warm the heart; may excite our emulation, and rouse up the languishing spirit of devotion. But the trials of ancient times produced examples so illustrious, that while the heart is affected, the conscience also is enlightened. We are not carried away with

sympathetic impulses, which have no foundation but in the wild dreams of fanaticism, or the tumultuous emotions of enthusiasm. No. The understanding takes a share in the impression: we approve while we wonder; and our reason is as much convinced by the evidence of truth, as our passions are captivated by the power of what is singular and extraordinary.

When we review those times in which such great examples occur, we are led to make comparisons that are by no means flattering to the present age. The characteristic feature of the times in which we live is indifference to religion in general. The power of godliness is neglected; and shall we wonder that the form of it should be slighted and despised? Under the pretence of emancipating the human mind from the bondage of superstition, the common offices of devotion have been decried. From the affectation of candour we have sunk into listlessness; and have tamely suffered a daring spirit of infidelity to oppose, and a specious heresy to undermine, the interests of Christianity; because we have been apprehensive that our firmness would be stigmatized with the odious name of bigotry!

It has indeed been always the unhappy

fate of mankind to run into extremes ; and in matters of religion this perverse bent of human nature has principally discovered itself. Lukewarmness and intemperate zeal have, each in its turn, proved unspeakably injurious to the Christian cause. The former silently and secretly saps its foundations ; and though its progress be slow and insensible, yet its effects are too fatal not to alarm the friends of religion. The latter has exposed the cause it professed to patronize ; and, by its wrong and preposterous methods of defence, has, in instances too numerous to be recounted, but too melancholy to be forgotten, afforded the enemies that opposed it an occasion of triumph, which the merits of their own cause by no means entitled them to claim.

The children of wisdom, while they feel their better hopes secured by its promises, cannot grow indifferent to its interests, nor look on the insults which are from time to time offered to its most sacred and awful obligations, with the coldness of unconcerned spectators. They cannot see its holy institutions slighted, or its essential doctrines blasphemed, without lamenting that degeneracy of mind and manners, which is the fatal origin of all. They cannot but tremble at the

probable, I will not say approaching, issue of such ingratitude to Heaven for its *unspeakable gift*.

But the wisdom which they are taught to value, they know how to defend. The spirit which it inspires is *first pure, and then peaceable, gentle, full of good fruits, easy to be entreated, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*. Their candour does not make them lukewarm, nor their zeal uncharitable.

The Epicureans of antiquity, and the infidels of our own days, arrogantly boast of their high achievements, in snapping asunder the chains of superstition; and in the execution of their desperate purpose they go forward with unshaken fortitude, and unremitting alacrity. Must we then grow supine and inactive, when the danger is more imminent and threatening? Must we affect the petty popularity, which arises from flattering the prejudices of men, instead of aspiring to the glory of saving their souls? Far be such complication of meanness and perfidy from the children of wisdom.

We are exhorted to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*: and our Saviour has given us this awful warning, that “if we are ashamed of him and of his words in this adulterous and sinful genera-

tion, of us also will he be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father, and with his holy angels." But if we confess him before men, if we vindicate the honour of his gospel by a well-conducted opposition to those who would discredit its divinity, or corrupt its doctrines; if we justify our zeal by our practice, and thus *glorify that holy name by which we are called*, he will most certainly acknowledge us in that day, when his approbation will be the highest reward that an immortal spirit can enjoy.

The sincere and well-informed advocates of the gospel, while engaged in the justification of its principles, and the support of its interests, are careful not to lavish their activity on subjects of remote effect, or barren curiosity. Wisdom reserves its vigour for exertions worthy of its own noble aims; and if it be *zealously affected*, it is *in a good thing*. Actuated by such motives, and placed in such circumstances, it not only defies all the arts of calumny, but challenges some tribute of praise. The everlasting truths of the gospel, with which the welfare of mankind is most nearly connected, demand our serious regards, and justify the warmest efforts of zeal, directed by knowledge, and tempered by philanthropy.

There are errors that would bereave us of every hope which points to immortality, loosen the best cement of society, and overturn the very constitution of religion both natural and revealed. Opposition to such errors deserves not the odious epithets of bigotry and superstition. Infidelity, we know, has its zealots ; and heresies of the most malignant tendency have their advocates ; advocates, who scorn accommodation with what they are pleased to call the inventions of priestcraft, and the prejudices of the vulgar ; who make a triumphant boast of the freedom with which they oppose the peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of Christianity ; who are neither ashamed nor afraid to declare openly to the world, that as they have hitherto exerted themselves, so will they continue to exert themselves, in demolishing the fortresses of orthodoxy. They disdain to pay any reverence to the rust of antiquity—they are no respecters of the authority attached to names—they scorn to sacrifice any precarious opinion about the purity of truth to the established peace of the world. The collective wisdom and exemplary piety of preceding generations are to the philosopher a stumblingblock, and to the innovator foolishness.

In repressing the violence, and in exposing the absurdities, of such writers, we act a part which prejudiced men may perhaps impute to unworthy motives. But why are we blamed for doing to others, what others, if they supposed us to lie under any dangerous delusion, would make a merit of doing to us? Is that officious in the children of wisdom, which in their adversaries is benevolent? is their firmness our obstinacy? Their cause surely has no presumptive proof of superiority. Their abilities are not of a greater size. Their activity is not directed to nobler ends.

They laugh indeed at our blindness, and they rail at our ardour: but to hear the rude clamours of those who assault Christianity, or of those who betray it, without emotion and without resistance, would imply a tameness of spirit, which our enemies would be the first to insult and to ridicule. By silent forbearance, or languid opposition, we should indeed give too much colour to an insinuation lately thrown out by one who has rushed foremost in the ranks, and sounded with a louder blast than his fellows the horn of battle, that we *are at ease in Zion*, only because we are grown indifferent to her better interests.

There are indeed too many persons, from

whom a more consistent conduct might have been expected, who are active in the prosecution of those temporal privileges, which are connected with their spiritual function, and who eagerly pant for honours and distinctions; yet are too little concerned to promote the honour of the gospel, and quite indifferent about the preservation of those glorious truths, which render it at once the admiration and delight of rational but guilty and fallen creatures.

But it is unfair to argue from particulars to universals, and ungenerous to censure the whole for the defects or errors of a few. There are many whose conduct still tends to rescue their profession from the disgrace which malice is eager to throw on it. Wisdom can yet boast of children, whose mingled zeal and prudence do not disgrace the cause they have the honour to support.

But while they justify her cause, it is in such a manner as will not bring any discredit on its true principles and genuine tendency. Their zeal for God never contradicts their charity to men. While it opposes principles which are injurious to the interests of truth, and destructive to the souls of men, yet it diminishes not the sincerest regard for the persons of those by whom such princi-

ples are adopted. It loves the man, it esteems the scholar, it applauds the believer, even while it faithfully chastens his guilt, or freely admonishes him of his error. But false zeal will load with opprobrium, and then consign to damnation every man whom it is unable to convince or to persuade: thus in the church of Rome, if it cannot convert, it will curse or exterminate; when argument fails, menaces succeed; and, should threatening be despised, it is rendered effectual by punishment.

But *we have not so learned Christ*. His gospel inspires a different spirit, and the establishment and propagation of its truths require a very different mode of conduct.

There is some difficulty indeed in fixing by precept the boundaries of that zeal, with which Christians in general, and the ministers of the gospel in particular, ought to be inspired: but example will at once unfold the principle of zeal as a quality, and enforce the obligation of it as a duty. In the conduct of St. Paul we see this virtue well illustrated; and we may most becomingly, and most profitably, contemplate it as a model of imitation.

The principal object this illustrious child of wisdom had in view was the glory of

God ; and this he was convinced could only be properly and effectually promoted by steadiness and prudence in maintaining the great truths of the gospel. To an object so momentous he sacrificed all that the world calls dear ; his ease, his interest, his reputation, yea even life itself. No fundamental doctrines did he obscure by partial suppression, or refine away by sophistical interpretation ; he taught them as he received them from above. He scorned to temporize, when his commission was clear, and the object of high and indubitable importance. In matters of little consequence he acted with discretion ; but it was a discretion which the strictest integrity warranted, which the frailties or the prepossessions of his hearers required, nay, which the higher interests of the church itself loudly and unequivocally demanded.

We have a very animated description of his noble and honest zeal in the necessary opposition which he made to the false teachers, who had insidiously endeavoured, by hypocritical shews of a purer and more ancient doctrine, to corrupt and pervert the Galatian church. *False brethren*, says he, *unawares brought in, who came privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring*

us into bondage : to whom we gave place by subjection no not for an hour ; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you^a. Thus the apostle exemplified his own position, that he could do nothing against the truth, either negatively or positively ; either by opposing it himself, or by tamely acquiescing in the opposition of its enemies.

All truths are not of equal moment, or supported by evidence equally clear ; in matters of a doubtful nature, concession therefore is ultimately of more advantage to the interests of truth than contention. We should, however, be careful what points we assign to the class of dubious and unimportant controversy. Indifference, under the mask of moderation, has made so many grants by way of accommodating the gospel to what has been sanctified by the plausible name of reason, that very little seems left to distinguish it from a system of mere theism. Hence some men have violently wrested the divinity and atonement of our blessed Saviour from the Christian scheme, under the pretence of reducing it to a greater degree of simplicity, and of rendering it more consistent with the prejudices of Jews, Mahometans, and infidels of every class : not con-

sidering, that in those prejudices the great cause of Christianity must be lost; and before them not only its peculiar doctrines, but even the more essential parts of moral and religious duty, must give way.

If we must yield to preconceived opinions by way of accommodation, why not to practices which have been rendered familiar by custom, and to institutions which have on them the venerable stamp of long prescription? Some have told us, that we shall never convert the unbeliever, till we indiscriminately and avowedly abandon those doctrines which are called mysterious: and of late one daring adventurer in the field of reformation has thrown aside the common restraints of modesty, and, with an effrontery equally singular and insulting, has informed the Christian world, that there is no prospect of converting the Mahometans, unless they have a sanction from the church to continue in the practice of polygamy^b!

Amidst the claimants of truth, who are to be gratified? Amidst the various projectors of reformation, whose plans are to be adopted? Many set up pretensions to exclusive preference: all assert their privilege of being coolly and impartially heard. Let therefore

^b Thelyphthora, vol. ii. p. 85, &c.

all be heard ; though in the mass of human opinions, and amidst the conflict of human passions, all cannot be satisfied.

'There is a spirit which seems to be always discontented, till its wildest claims are allowed ; and which, having been turbulent under injudicious restraint, becomes tyrannical when in possession of usurped authority.

But let not the freedom of enquiry be shackled. For if it multiplies contentions among the wise and virtuous, it exercises the charity of those who contend. If it shakes for a time the belief which is rested only upon prejudice, it finally settles it on the broader and more solid basis of conviction.

Truth assuredly has nothing to fear from the opposition of its enemies : and the children of wisdom are not to be seduced from their persuasion of its excellence, by the subtlety of the sophist, or the calumnies of the scoffer. They know that its origin is from above ; and that an almighty arm protects and secures it. They do indeed deplore that malignity of heart, and that blindness of understanding, which too frequently appear in the designs of its various adversaries, either to pervert its principles, or to obstruct its genuine influence : yet they have too much respect for their cause, to disgrace it

by the base and unnatural aid of persecution; and they have too much confidence in their own strength, to shrink from a contest in which the triumphs of error are precarious and transitory.

They are convinced, that the weapons of the Christian warfare *are not carnal, but spiritual*; and that our religion, though protected by human power against violence and outrage, for the sake of preserving its members in peace, yet is to make its way in the world only by the force of evidence; and to keep its ground as well by the moderation as by the abilities of its advocates.

The liberal spirit of the Church of England, and the general cultivation of science, as they render religion among other things an object of attention and investigation, must be expected to expose it also to the objections and doubts of those, whose enquiries have been conducted upon wrong principles, or who have not fully considered the arguments by which it may be most successfully defended.

Conscious of the difficulties in which the moral Governor of the universe seems to have left many interesting topics, reflecting on the different degrees of vigour which belong to different understandings, and sensi-

ble of the various lights in which the same question presents itself in various circumstances, the friend of truth is more ready to enquire than to dogmatize, and to inform than to condemn. There is an opposition which he considers as of a more enlightened and liberal kind ; which is conducted with temper and decency ; which has not for its object those licentious and immoral views which have been justly charged upon the more popular systems of infidelity ; and which, instead of proving injurious to the great cause it attacks, will be eventually the means of confirming its authority, and of illustrating its principles.

Such opposition excites a keener attention not only among the adversaries, but the friends of the gospel. It brings forward into open day those evidences, which are dimly and indistinctly perceived by both. It clears them from every useless incumbrance which tends to obscure their lustre. It confirms and sanctifies the faith of the Christian ; it humbles the arrogance, where it cannot overcome the prepossessions, of the infidel : the inquisitive are instructed ; and the impartial are completely and unalterably convinced.

Among the teachers of the Christian reli-

gion, it is unquestionably a duty to study its evidences with such care, and to examine its principles with such integrity, *as to be able always to give a reason of the hope that is in them.* But there are other obligations also attending the clerical profession, of more immediate concern than the mere office of repelling hostile objections, or even of removing the sincere but painful scruples of our neighbour.

From the natural modesty of their dispositions, or perhaps from the want of opportunity to collect materials for the purposes of publication, many excellent men are contented with retaining their own faith in silence and obscurity; and with diffusing the saving truths of the gospel only among those who are committed to their charge.

There is therefore a singular propriety in those institutions, the principal object of which is the refutation of error; and which are intended always to provide an antidote to the poison that may be instilled.

The liberal piety of our nation has given rise to many institutions of this kind: and it cannot be denied, that much has thus been added to the general stock of learning, and still more to the elucidation of the particular evidences of natural and revealed religion.

Men of extensive knowledge and solid judgment have by these means been called forth to public view, at a time when raillery might have discouraged the modest; and when the most sanguine might have despaired of victory, from the number, rather than the talents, of those who were leagued together in the support of impiety. They have been roused by the call of pious and munificent patrons, to stand forth as the champions of truth, virtue, and religion. Their abilities have excited the general veneration of the world: their candour has extorted praise even from their hardest antagonists: and by their success in explaining and defending the doctrines of revelation, the wisdom of the founders has been amply justified, and their generosity abundantly recompensed by that which they would have themselves esteemed the noblest of all rewards, the fair and final establishment of evangelical truth.

Thus the absurdity of atheism has been exposed; and the atheist driven from the field he had the presumption to call his own, even by the very weapons which he chose for his defence. Deism in all its forms has been examined and detected: all its illiberal cavils have been replied to; all its haughty pretensions confounded; and even the perti-

ment and momentous objections, to which the best informed and best disposed of its advocates sometimes had recourse, have been weighed with impartiality, and refuted by argument.

Heresies of an appearance less alarming, though perhaps in their consequences not less fatal, have been clearly refuted, and successfully exposed, by the united zeal and industry, learning and impartiality, of men, who have been called forth to exert their talents in this laudable employment by such institutions as the present.

Those tenets, which rash and superficial enquirers had supposed to be destitute of foundation, have been expressed with greater precision, supported by stronger proofs, and recommended by new illustrations.

Our own church, more especially, has asserted with just and growing confidence her superiority over all other establishments. She has been enabled to resist the unkind and unfair assaults that have been made against her doctrines. She has seen in her friends a constant increase of that sound knowledge, which ever draws onward in its train an increase of good morals.

The children of wisdom, thus going on from strength to strength, are not to be

deterred from the prosecution of their researches, or the avowal of their sentiments, by illiberal insinuation, or audacious invective. *While they search all things, they hold fast that which is good.* They are not dismayed by groundless and vulgar imputations of indulging a spirit of real bigotry, and of contending for the credit of imaginary orthodoxy. Their task is arduous; their intentions are honourable; and in every contest where they have hitherto been opposed, they may justly boast of having been more than conquerors in the day of trial.

It appears then, that by these institutions the children of wisdom have rendered essential service to religion.

Objections, which from their minuteness might otherwise have been neglected, have now received the most satisfactory answers; and doubts, which from their obscurity, or from the modesty of those in whose minds they arose, might have remained unresolved, have been openly examined, and fairly removed. In short, every part of the great fabric of religion has received some distinct support or illustration, which has added to the strength and beauty of the whole system.

But these institutions, salutary as they may have been to the cause of Christianity,

and propitious to the interests of science, have not been totally exempt from objection.

As every subject of human speculation is bounded by some limits, additional proofs, and even additional illustrations, cannot always be expected: and institutions which require the unremitted attention of the mind, and the application of learning and argument to the same subjects, may be suspected rather of adding to the quantity, than to the real uses of speculation; and of promoting more an anxiety for novel opinions, than a serious concern for established truths. Though the earlier periods of these institutions, therefore, have been distinguished by a more than ordinary display of erudition, and their utility is become as conspicuous as the abilities which supported them; yet genius itself will languish, when confined to one track, nor will learning be able to recruit its vigour, when it finds that its stores have been made common to others. In this case we have much to apprehend from the indolent, and, perhaps, still more from the vain. With the former the cause will be weakened by dulness and insipidity; with the latter it will be perverted by the lust of novelty. The indolent, despairing of making any valuable

addition to the proofs, or general illustrations of religion, will content themselves with the same track that others have pursued, and be satisfied with the negative merit of saying nothing amiss. The vain will have recourse to fancy, to supply the want of more solid matter; and will give scope to airy speculation, in order to have the credit of advancing something singular.

It cannot therefore be expected, that on the same subjects of discussion, and those subjects circumscribed by very narrow limits, the progress should be as splendid as the commencement: and to those who are adverse, or even indifferent to the cause of religion, it may afford some little matter of triumph, or some slight ground for sceptical insinuation, that on subjects of such unequalled moment, so little of what is captivating by the mere charms of novelty, is produced by the most comprehensive research, and the most elaborate explanation.

The objection, however, is of no weight, when duly considered. Religion is, like its Author, unchangeable. The reasons which support it are as old as itself: and though its proofs may be set in a new light, yet the proofs themselves cannot be new. To the word of God it were presumption to add; it

is our duty to take nothing from it; and in these circumstances whatever doctrine professes to be at once essential to be known, and yet hitherto unknown, may, in consequence of such profession, be suspected of dangerous mistake.

It is, however, a subject of congratulation to the University, that the Lecture to which I have had the honour of being appointed is perfectly free from the objection which a want of variety is too apt to produce among those, in whom the principles of religion are so weak and languishing, as to need something more than the particular subjects to which other institutions have been directed to engage their attention.

The wisdom of our Founder has been as conspicuous as his liberality. The plan which he has adopted is extensive and various; it gives scope to philosophical and historical enquiry; and to those who unite the love of virtue with curiosity, it will be a source of perpetual information. The connection between sacred and profane learning, and the consistence of true religion with true philosophy, are by repeated experiments now decided.

Whatever science therefore shall investigate may here be pursued, as far as the cause

of religion can receive any illustration from it. Polite literature may here open its noblest stores ; and criticism apply them to the elucidation of obscure passages, and to the establishment of fundamental truths.

Whatever of argument or illustration may be brought forward from time to time, that tends to throw additional light on the general evidences, or the particular doctrines, of the Christian religion ; on the general institutions of the catholic church, or the particular forms that distinguish our own ; may here be admitted, as in a receptacle prepared for its preservation, and calculated to give it proper use and salutary effect.

From the corruptions which grow out of excessive civilization, and from the mischiefs which attend the improper and indiscriminate fondness that pervades all ranks of men for philosophical subjects, we have little reason to suppose that the period will soon arrive, in which no additional objections shall be brought against the evidence or the doctrines of the gospel. Here then, it is to be hoped, such answers will always be produced, as will be sufficient to counteract their influence, and to expose their futility.

But while this institution is directed to the general object of defending and establishing

the Christian faith; and on that account possesses, in common with other similar institutions which preceded it, the same general utility; it has also the superior advantage of blending together whatever was peculiar and appropriate to them, and of uniting all their excellencies in itself.

It is indeed principally designed to counteract the progress of error in all its forms, and of infidelity under every mode of opposition. As such, the object is of supreme importance, and opens an extensive field for speculation. The sources of error are inexhaustible; and whilst either vanity or vice influences mankind, it will be easy for sophistry to invent new forms of objection; while profligacy will be ever disposed to discredit the faith that condemns it. We may flatter ourselves, however, with this hope, that as much ingenuity will be shewn in the defence of our faith, as can be exerted in opposing it, and that while the enemy is sowing tares, the Christian husbandman will not be less vigilant in cultivating the good seed.

Hitherto, indeed, infidelity has not been able to achieve any thing which may recompence the activity, or gratify the vanity, of its advocates. They have successfully employed the arts of conversion with the churlish mis-

anthrope, who would assimilate the character of the Deity to the dark and unamiable complexion of his own; with the raw and conceited stripling, who disdains to tread in the beaten track of opinion; or with the obdurate libertine, who is interested in weakening the sanctions, and disproving the very existence, of a law by which he stands condemned. But have the virtuous and the wise, have men of the highest rank in literature, or of the most respectable reputations in society, gone over to their party?

We do not envy them the paltry pittance of glory which they can acquire from the number of converts, who *love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil*: but we are most sincerely anxious for the sake of other men, to rescue them from the baneful and specious allurements of opinions, which will either draw them aside to vice, or prevent their return to virtue, once neglected and deserted.

Our religion, however, is not itself tarnished by the corruptions of those who wantonly abandon, or malignantly revile it. The same cause, we are aware, will always produce the same effect: and while the gospel continues to inculcate a pure doctrine, it

must expect a very unwelcome reception from the corrupt passions of mankind.

But while we justify the ways of God, we mean not to speak with undistinguishing contempt, or with unrelenting asperity, of every man by whom they have been arraigned. In some of those who look upon the gospel with an unfriendly eye, we readily acknowledge, and, under any other circumstances, we should warmly admire, very shining abilities. They have attacked our citadel by every instrument of violence, and with every stratagem of art. Our antagonists have sometimes assailed it with declamatory eloquence, and sometimes undermined it with the aid of metaphysical subtlety: but the church of Christ is, we experimentally know, deeply and firmly founded on a rock: and the blasts of opposition, however sudden and however impetuous, are insufficient to overthrow it.

Yet, disposed, as we are, to do justice to the talents of those who differ from us, and compelled, as we are, to lament the sad perversion of them, we resist with indignation the disingenuous and haughty pretensions which they put up to eminent superiority of learning, and to peculiar liberality of sentiment. We know, in fact, that our religion

has been sincerely believed, and strenuously defended, by men who have ascended the summit of human knowledge by the vigour of their genius, and the intenseness of their application.

Locke and Malbranche do not yield the palm of metaphysical acuteness to the sullen sophistry of Hobbes, or the cold scepticism of Hume. In brilliancy of imagination and delicacy of taste, Berkeley is, surely, not inferior to Shaftesbury. In solid and masculine sense, and in erudition classical or philosophical, who are the champions of infidelity that deserve to be compared with a Taylor, a Wilkins, a Cudworth, a Barrow, a Clark, a Boyle, and a Newton?

And what, we may boldly ask, what is there in the nature of things themselves, that acuteness of penetration and justness of reasoning should be exclusively possessed by those who deride Christianity, or by those who corrupt it?

If great and good men yet adhere to our party, when they may, upon conviction, desert it, without danger and without infamy; a strong presumption arises, that the cause of religious wisdom has been ably and successfully pleaded by her children.

We have indeed ever been ready to meet

our antagonists on any fair ground of disputation. We are not afraid of coming to the test of history, and of criticism ; of ethics, where they are sound, and of metaphysics, where they are intelligible. We decline the use of no weapons that are honourable : at the same time we wish not to be indebted for our triumphs to the pointed shafts of ridicule, or to the poisonous arts of insinuation. But while we professedly ourselves disdain to use such modes of defence, we are not terrified at the eagerness with which other men employ them.

There is a Providence which controls all human events, and brings good out of evil : and it is this Providence which seems to have permitted the attacks of infidelity, in order to give greater evidence to the faith it opposes.

It is not necessary in the present situation of things to attempt any new arrangement of proofs, or system of evidence. It will be time enough to invent some fresh modes of demonstration, when it is found that the old are incapable of affording conviction to the honest and impartial enquirer after truth.

The nature of evidence, however, depends in a great measure on the manner in which

it is considered ; and the same arguments and illustrations will appear in very different lights of strength and conviction, according to our various modes of study and habits of reflection.

If therefore I presume not in the following discourses to produce any testimonies unheard of, or arguments hitherto unknown, in support of our faith ; yet I hope I shall be entitled to your indulgence, if I in some degree deviate from the more common track of speculation, and apply my attention to a species of discussion, which has, perhaps from the remoteness of that sort of learning on which it depends, been handled with less minuteness of investigation than its importance seems to demand.

It may be presumed, that those topics are best understood by us, to which we have devoted the greatest share of application. On this ground I may flatter myself with the hopes of your candid attention, while I am more immediately treating those subjects, to which the course of studies pursued from my own choice, and the nature of an academical employment conferred by your kindness, have pointed my enquiries—*in quo tamen ego quid eniti, aut quid efficere possim, mala*

in aliorum spe relinquere, quam in oratione ponere mea ^c.

The great scene of revelation has been the EAST. There the source of genuine inspiration was first opened; and from thence the streams of divine knowledge began to flow. It was the grand theatre, on which the almighty Governor of the world *made bare his arm, and by signs and wonders, and mighty deeds*, established the conviction of his righteous providence and supreme dominion in the hearts of men. There he led the people of Israel like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron: there the Prophets uttered their predictions: and there the Son of God illustrated and fulfilled them.

But there also has the impostor Mahomet erected his standard — that standard to which thousands have flocked, with an ardour that may well raise a blush on the countenances of too many, who pretend to fight under the banner of the cross.

Whosoever, therefore, has bent his attention to the pursuits of oriental literature, and the study of eastern history, must be deeply impressed with this peculiar and distinguishing circumstance of Asiatic history: and he will unavoidably form some comparisons be-

^c Cicero, Orat. in Qu. Cæcilium.

tween those two great sources of religious opinion. From the climes which he reviews have sprung those powerful systems, which have spread themselves over the most enlightened portion of the globe; and which for ages have determined the belief, and influenced the conduct of the greatest nations which inhabit it. Beginning equally in silence and obscurity, they have advanced to a dominion equally unknown in any former age: but widely different in the causes by which their success has been produced, and in the principles on which their authority is founded; they call the attention of philosophy to the investigation of their history, as to the sublimest object, which can interest the curious, or employ the profound.

Whether they be considered as the sources of religious belief, and as thus agitating in the most powerful manner the hopes and fears of mankind; or as the principles which have influenced the revolutions of nations, and thus including the causes of the most memorable events in human history; they stand forth as the most brilliant subjects of religious and political speculation, and claim the best exertions of philosophical sagacity.

Amidst scenes so striking and so eventful, the student of oriental literature cannot re-

main unmoved. Whatever knowledge he may have acquired, whatever judgment he may possess, must be usefully laid out in comparing those two great sects which thus divide mankind, and in collecting from deep and impartial enquiry the marks of true and false inspiration.

In pursuit of researches, stretched through so large an extent, and which embrace so many important objects, he will probably be led to consider these two religions in their History, their Evidence, and their Effects; as the three great sources of comparison, by which their truth is to be determined.

He will begin, therefore, by examining the situation of the world at the respective periods when their authors appeared: and from this investigation he will with certainty infer, what can be assigned to the wisdom of heaven, and what to the policy of men.

He will then weigh in the balance of calm and unprejudiced reason the evidence upon which they rest their claims; and endeavour by these means to fix the criteria of real and pretended revelation.

He will close his enquiries by considering their effects upon mankind, whether as individuals, or nations: for from the tendency of a religion to promote the present happiness

of men, we may determine the probability of its connection with their future interests. In this manner it is probable that he will be able to ascertain the nature and character of these respective systems better than in the more inartificial method of detached and desultory enquiry. For, doubtless, in proportion to the variety and magnitude of those circumstances in which either system is seen to be farther removed from the wily stratagems a deceiver would employ, and the base ends he would pursue ; in proportion as it approaches nearer to the idea of such a religion as the divine Being, who acts for the best purposes by the best means, may be supposed to communicate to mankind ; in that exact proportion will its claims be authenticated and its evidence confirmed.

It is to this great subject of discussion that I presume to call the attention of the audience I now address ; and I do not know that it is within the compass of my information to bring any more useful or more proper offering to the truth of our faith, than the result of those enquiries which my situation and profession have enabled me to make. I purpose therefore to consider, in their most important points of view, the characters of Mahometism and Christianity, and the na-

ture of their respective pretensions to a divine origin.

Nothing, surely, is so likely to attract the attention of scholars to eastern literature, as the splendid scene of Asiatic history which is here presented to them; and the important treasures of religious, of political, and of philosophical information which it contains.

We rejoice in the progress of every study, which connects the various materials of knowledge by new ties, diversifies them by new combinations, and enlarges the views of the contemplative and pious believer. We feel a growing confidence in our cause, from the conviction, that the farther such enquiries are pursued, and the more such information, as may facilitate them, is collected, the more firmly will the truth of our faith be established; and the more magnificent views will it unfold to us of the connection in which Christianity stands with the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind.

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 and the more magnificent views will it unfold
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S E R M O N II.

ACTS v. 38, 39.

If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

THE miraculous propagation and final establishment of Christianity, the triumphs it has obtained over obstacles the most formidable, and the effects it has produced by instruments in appearance the most inadequate, have frequently been urged as decisive proofs of its divinity and truth.

In support of this argument the words now before us, which contain the famous maxim of Gamaliel, in his advice to the Jewish council, are sometimes adduced. But with whatever propriety the text may be applied to the particular case of Christianity, the general principle is not to be admitted, without many exact and interesting distinctions.

Success alone is undoubtedly no certain criterion of the truth and divinity of any religious system; no absolute proof of the concurrence and approbation of Heaven.

For is it not evident, that God permits error to prevail in the world, nay sometimes to a greater extent than the truth itself? The fact we cannot dispute, where we are utterly unable to assign the final cause. The efficient causes do indeed sometimes lie open to our view; they are to be found in the nature and condition of man; they do not clash with the moral attributes of the Deity; and they supply abundant matter as well to gratify our curiosity, as to subdue our pride.

God has constituted us free agents, and has endued us with faculties, which though sufficient, if properly exerted, to lead us into the discovery of truth, are still limited and circumscribed. We are therefore fallible creatures, liable to be imposed upon either by the delusions of our own imaginations, or by the artifices of interested impostors. Unqualified for deep speculation and laborious research, the great bulk of mankind is oftener directed by fancy, by prejudice, or interest, than by reason. Hence it happens, that, misled by the craft and cunning of those who lie in wait to deceive, or seduced by doctrines flattering and agreeable to the corruption of the human heart, numbers in all ages, forsaking the truth, have embraced

with willingness, and propagated with zeal, the grossest and most pernicious mistakes.

If our own experience should be insufficient to convince us of these facts, the history of past ages will teach us by melancholy examples, how extensive an influence error has often been permitted to obtain over the minds of men. Even from the earliest ages of the world, down to that glorious era when the Sun of righteousness arose to give light to them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death, it pleased the divine Providence to suffer the far greater part of mankind to lie in the darkest ignorance, with regard to the grand fundamental principles of all religion.

The worship, and I had almost said the knowledge, of the one true God were, through various revolutions of empires, and amidst various modes of life, confined within the narrow limits of Judæa. And even among the peculiar people, which had been separated from the nations by an extraordinary act of divine Providence for the express purpose of preserving this knowledge pure and untainted, the baleful influence of error was too often felt. The honours due only to the great Creator were unworthily transferred to the creature; the altars of Jehovah

became the seats of superstition and idolatry. In the days of ^aAhab, there remained only *seven thousand in Israel, who had not bowed the knee to Baal*: and under the impious Jeroboam, while ten tribes followed the gods of Dan and Bethel, two only continued to worship the Lord at Jerusalem.

Instances have never been wanting of men, who from interested motives, for the acquisition of power, have pretended to hold immediate converse with the Deity; and whose pretences, from the sagacious artifices of the teacher, or the abject credulity of the people, have been crowned with success.

Rome furnished a Numa, who gave the highest sanction and authority to the dictates of human prudence and policy, by delivering them to his subjects as the express revelations of the immortal gods: and thus firmly established a system, which, with some subsequent additions, remained entire through the various revolutions of the Roman commonwealth; till at length the religion of Christ triumphed over Polytheism, and the banner of the Cross was erected on the ruins of the Capitol.

Nor did the introduction of Christianity into the world produce any alteration, at

^a 1 Kings xix. 18.

least in this respect, in the manner of God's dealings with mankind. Even when it pleased him to employ extraordinary means for an extraordinary end, and to propagate the truth by aids to which the advocates of falsehood could not have recourse, he still dealt with men as with free and rational creatures. They were still left at liberty either to embrace or reject what he had revealed: and by some it was actually so far resisted, as to draw down the just judgment of infatuation as a punishment for such resistance. Thus was it with the Pharisees, *whose eyes he blinded, and whose hearts he hardened, lest they should see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted.*

Even the final establishment of the Gospel did not totally extirpate error and delusion from the world. Tares were still permitted to spring up, and sometimes even to choke the good seed. The history of the earlier ages of Christianity is little more than a melancholy recital of successive heresies and absurdities; some of which were either plucked up by the hand of reformation, or left to wither of themselves; while others, taking deep root, were suffered to flourish

^b John xii. 40.

a long time, and almost to overshadow the church.

But let not the excellency of Christianity be depreciated, because it failed to do what could not be done, without violence to the whole intellectual and moral constitution of its professors: let not the veracity of its Author be impeached, because his followers have rushed headlong into those erroneous and impious opinions, which he has himself most explicitly foretold, and most pointedly condemned. ^c *Take heed, says he, that no man deceive you: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.* — ^d *For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

— Thus he foretold; and the event justified the prediction.

But among all the instances of audacious and successful imposture which history has recorded, none has been more widely diffused, or more firmly established, than that of the pretended prophet of Arabia. Born in an obscure and uncivilized country, entitled to no preeminence of power or authority, the grand impostor, by the mere

^c Matt. xxiv. 4, 5. ^d Ib. 24.

force of a bold and fertile genius, assisted by a concurrence of circumstances universally auspicious to his design, was enabled to obtain the most unbounded empire over the minds as well as persons of a very large portion of mankind; and together with a temporal kingdom, to introduce and fix a religion, which has subsisted in almost undiminished vigour to the present times, through the long period of more than 1100 years.

The rapid propagation of Mahometism, and the brilliant victories of its Founder, have frequently been urged by his followers as the express testimonies of heaven to the truth and holiness of their religion: to this argument divines of the Romish communion^e have given too much countenance, by representing amplitude, duration, and temporal prosperity among the characteristic and infallible marks of the true church. But surely that can be no argument in favour of any system, which might equally be alleged by all; and which the follower of Numa, and the disciple of Mahomet, no less than the Christian, have in reality pleaded as proofs of a divine original in their respective religions.

It appears then, as well from experience

^e See Bellarm. de Notis Ecclesiæ.

that error often does, as from the nature and constitution of man that it sometimes must, prevail in the world ; and consequently that the establishment of any religious system, when considered by itself, determines nothing with regard to the truth of its doctrines, or the superior authority of its sanctions. What is uncommon must not be confounded with what is supernatural : what can be accounted for by human means must not be hastily and indiscriminately ascribed to divine. Success, which is not only compatible with the existence of a revelation immediately proceeding from God, but even inseparable from it in our ideas, must not be insisted upon as directly and properly demonstrative of the source whence any religion flowed.

But when the advocate for Christianity argues in its behalf, that so many thousands were on a sudden converted to the faith ; that the religion of Christ so widely and so auspiciously spread its influence over a large portion of the habitable world ; the force of this argument is not derived from the mere prevalence of Christianity, but from its prevalence under those peculiar circumstances, in which the gospel, at its first preaching, appears to have been placed.

Nor does the important argument in favour of Christianity, thus drawn from its rapid propagation, lose any thing of its weight, from the establishment of false religions in the world ; unless it could be shewn, that they were propagated under circumstances equally disadvantageous, and by means equally miraculous.

How far this was the case with Mahometism, will appear from an impartial consideration of the state of things at the time when it was proposed to the world, and of the causes which contributed to its success.

In reviewing the causes which seem to have facilitated the progress of Mahometism, the first and greatest which presents itself to our consideration is the miserable and distracted state of the Christian church.

If in surveying the history of the sixth and seventh centuries we call to our remembrance that purity of doctrine, that simplicity of manners, that spirit of meekness and universal benevolence, which marked the character of the Christian in the apostolic age, the dreadful reverse which we here behold cannot but strike us with astonishment and horror. Divided into numberless parties on account of distinctions the most trifling and absurd, contending with each other from

perverseness, and persecuting each other with rancour, corrupt in opinion, and degenerate in practice, the Christians of this unhappy period seem to have retained little more than the name and external profession of their religion. Of a Christian church scarce any vestige remained. The most unchristian principles and opinions were universally predominant; ignorance amidst the most favourable opportunities of knowledge; vice amidst the noblest encouragements to virtue; a pretended zeal for truth, mixed with the wildest extravagancies of error; an implacable spirit of discord about opinions which none could settle; and a general and striking similarity in the commission of crimes, which it was the duty and interest of all to avoid!

The gospel indeed was in itself pure and holy, while these hideous features of deformity characterized its infatuated professors: but through the prejudiced understandings and indignant tempers of men, the odium incurred by persons was vehemently and unjustly transferred to things: the merits of the cause were not separated by dispassionate and nice distinction from the glaring imperfections of those who patronized it: and the partial and temporary in-

efficacy of Christianity supplied a plausible train of objections to its credibility and its use.

It is an obvious though just remark, that true religion and learning have ever flourished and fallen together. Both had now for some centuries been hastening with equal and visible steps to decay. The sciences, unpatronized by the emperors and persons in authority, had long ceased to be considered as the roads to wealth and honour, and were therefore no longer cultivated. The interests of polite literature and philosophy had received irreparable injuries, by the incursions of the Goths and other barbarous nations into the western provinces of the Roman empire. During the violence and danger which naturally attended these tumultuous scenes, there remained but little leisure or opportunity for those who were still desirous of attending to the liberal arts. And it is highly probable that they must have totally perished in the general confusion, had they not found a wretched and precarious shelter in the cloisters of the monks. Here indeed their still venerable remains were preserved awhile; though they received only such a degree of culture, as served to

display the glorious height from which they had fallen.

Historians have exhibited to us the most melancholy picture of the universal darkness and ignorance, which at the beginning of the seventh century had overspread all ranks of men. Even the ecclesiastical orders scarcely afforded an exception to this general description. Among the bishops, the grand instructors and defenders of the Christian church, few (we are told) could be found, whose knowledge and abilities were sufficient to compose the discourses, however mean and incoherent, which their office sometimes obliged them to deliver to the people. The greater part of those among the monastic orders, whom the voice of an illiterate age had dignified with the character of learning, lavished their time and talents in studying the fabulous legends of pretended saints and martyrs, or in composing histories equally fabulous, rather than in the cultivation of true science, or the diffusion of useful knowledge.

Nor was the condition of the Eastern Church more favourable to the interests of literature. Distracted by the implacable animosity of contending parties, Nestorians,

Monophysites, and the numberless subdivisions of those two sects, it was a stranger to that peace and tranquillity which is absolutely necessary to the cultivation, and even the existence of learning. Intent only upon the annoyance of each other, all parties had equally forsaken the broad and open paths of manly philosophy and liberal science, for the narrow and perplexing intricacies of metaphysics. The champions of the contending factions directed alike their principal attention to the writings of Aristotle; and, in order to arm their followers with logical subtleties, translated many of the works of that profound philosopher into their respective languages^f.

Of the writings which threw a feeble glimmering over the darkness of this unhappy period, the far greater part were controversial. In the few which have remained to the present times, it is easy to trace the melancholy decline of piety as well as of literature. That natural and beautiful simplicity which is the striking characteristic of the writings of the apostolic age, and of the first defenders of Christianity, was now succeeded by the coarse and confused jargon of the schools, by the loud and fierce clamours of

^f See Abul-Pharaj. Hist. Dynast. p. 94.

personal invective, and by all the disingenuous arts of sophistry, which industriously perplexed truth ; and of bigotry, which perversely opposed it.

While ignorance was thus extending her dominion over the Christian world, superstition, her genuine offspring, followed close behind. The progress of corruption is rapid and unbounded. When once the professors of Christianity had departed from that purity of worship, and that simplicity of faith, which Christ and his apostles had prescribed, and impiously dared to erect a superstructure of worthless materials upon the firm and solid foundations of the gospel, it was impossible to fix any limits to the growing corruption. One abuse was daily added to another ; and the introduction of one superstition served only to pave the way for a thousand others, more false and more pernicious, which followed in its train.

To go back no farther than the beginning of the third century ; even at that early period, it is easy to observe the unseemly fabric of superstitious ceremony gradually rising upon the ruins of genuine piety. The far greater part of those corrupt doctrines and vain superstitions, which formerly occasioned the separation of our ancestors from

the communion of the Romish church, and of which we still continue to entertain a just abhorrence, were introduced and established during the darkness of this and the succeeding ages. An extravagant veneration for departed saints and martyrs ; the idolatrous worship of images and relics ; and, lastly, the absurd and fanciful notion of a Fire destined to purify the soul after death from the pollutions it had contracted while in the body ; these opinions, which are still held sacred and essential by the church of Rome, were the successive progeny of the ignorance and superstition of these ages.

At the time of Mahomet these corrupt opinions had nearly eclipsed the lustre of the gospel. The very essence of Christianity was lost under a load of idle and superstitious ceremonies, which were daily multiplied without bounds ; and the unmeaning pomp of a gaudy and ostentatious worship was substituted in the room of the simple yet nobler oblation of the heart.

The primitive Christians with anxious zeal confined their worship to the one most high God, and his son Jesus Christ ; but those who now called themselves by that venerable name, had multiplied almost to infinity the objects of their devotion. Neglecting or

forgetting the grand and only mediator between God and man, the trembling votary bowed at the shrine of some reputed saint, a mortal frail and weak like himself, to implore his intercession, either in obtaining the favour, or in averting the vengeance, of an offended God. The blessed Virgin was raised to a dignity, and adorned with titles, which neither Scripture could warrant, nor reason approve: and the mother of the man Christ Jesus was often honoured with a more assiduous devotion, and addressed with more frequent prayers, than the Son of God himself. Even the fancied remains of that cross, on which the Saviour of mankind had died, to expiate the sins of the world; the images of the saints who had laboured to disseminate, and the bones of the martyrs who had died to confirm, the faith; were now, by the arts of a designing priesthood, and the ignorance of a superstitious multitude, held up as proper objects of religious adoration.

Where opinions are thus depraved, it is unreasonable to expect that the practice should be exemplary. Accordingly we find, that the decay of morality kept equal pace with that of piety.

The wealth as well as the privileges and authority of the clergy had increased consi-

derably during the reign of ignorance and superstition. To this increase nothing had more effectually contributed, than the opinion that remission of sins, however black and heinous, was to be purchased by the liberality of the penitent to the churches and the ministry; and that the intercession of departed saints was to be bought by suitable offerings presented on the altars which were consecrated to their memory.

But the increasing wealth of the ecclesiastical orders gradually introduced among them all that train of vices and follies, which affluence and prosperity naturally bring with them. Their luxury, their pride, their ambition, knew no bounds. Hence the turbulent and shameless contentions of the bishops concerning the extent and authority of their sees. Hence the frequent and almost perpetual struggles between the bishops of Rome and Constantinople, the two grand rulers of the Christian church, to the irreparable injury and disgrace of Christianity.

But what seems more peculiarly to have characterized the age of which we are speaking, is the furious and relentless spirit of persecution.

It was the severe remark of a Pagan his-

torian^s concerning the Christians of the fourth century, "That their enmity towards each other exceeded the fury of the beasts against man." In the succeeding ages this evil gradually increased, till at length the unworthy professors of Christianity had universally let loose the savage spirit of persecution upon each other, without restraint, and without remorse. That charity and universal benevolence which the great Author of their religion so often enjoined, and so well exemplified in his own life and character, were by his degenerate followers either forgotten or disregarded. Varieties of opinion, which were rather nominal than real, and shades of difference which are scarcely perceptible to the acutest observer in the present age, were deemed sufficient to make void alike the spirit and awful commands of the gospel, the sacred privileges of humanity, and the tender ties of relationship. The blind fury of superstitious zeal extinguished the tenderest sentiments of nature; the majesty of the laws was trampled on and violated with impunity; the cities of the East were deluged with blood.

Such is the melancholy picture of com-

^s Ammian. Marcell. lib. xxii. cap. 5. p. 233.

plicated misery and distraction, which historians have universally drawn of the Christian world in general, and of the Eastern church in particular, at the opening of the seventh century.

It may be sufficient to have thus briefly represented the distinguishing particulars of the state of Christianity, at the time when Mahomet assumed the prophetic character. The advantages and assistance which the impostor derived from these circumstances of his times, in the propagation and establishment of his new religion, are sufficiently obvious: it is necessary only to remark, that these advantages were seized with irresistible ardour, and pursued with unremitted activity.

If the corruptions and distresses of Christianity were thus signally favourable to the aspiring views of Mahomet, the political and religious state of Arabia at that time contributed not less remarkably to the success of the impostor.

While the once formidable empires, of Rome on the one hand, overwhelmed by the fierce incursions of the northern barbarians, and of Persia on the other, distracted by its own intestine divisions, were evidently in the last stage of decay, Arabia was in every re-

spect prosperous and flourishing. Naturally populous in itself, it had received a very considerable accession of inhabitants from the Grecian empire; from whence the violence of religious persecution had driven great numbers to seek an asylum in a country, where they might enjoy their opinions without interruption, and profess them without danger.

Arabia had ever been celebrated as the seat of unbounded liberty: divided into many independent tribes, it of course admitted an almost endless variety of religious opinions.

The Jews had early established themselves in this country, even before the time of the apostles; for the Arabians are enumerated among those who came to celebrate the feast of Pentecost^h: and at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman power, many of them escaped hither, as to a place of refuge from the dreadful calamities, which the just vengeance of God inflicted on their nation. Christianity had also made a very considerable progress among some of the tribes of Arabia; and in particular that sect of it, which was distinguished by the title of Jacobites.

But the religion which was most ex-

^h Acts ii. 11.

tensively disseminated, and most highly esteemed among the Arabians, before the time of Mahomet, was idolatry. Of this there were several distinct kinds: but the predominant species appears to have been that of the Sabians; who held the unity of God, though at the same time they worshipped the fixed stars, and planets, the angels, and their images, as subordinate deities; whose mediation with the one most high and supreme God they ardently implored.

From the neighbouring situation and frequent intercourse which subsisted between the Persians and the inhabitants of Arabia, the religion of the Magi had likewise found its way, and obtained an establishment among some of their tribes.

To this divided state of the religion and government of Arabia, doubtless much of the success, if not the very existence, of Mahometism may be reasonably ascribed. Had the various unconnected tribes of that extensive country been united under one common government, the daring project must quickly and inevitably have been crushed by the weight of superior power. Or, had one common system of religious worship been universally received throughout the whole, the impostor must certainly have sunk under the

attempt to subvert the established belief and opinions of his country.

Prejudices derived from early education, and confirmed by habit, become as it were interwoven with our very constitution; and those opinions which seem connected with the awful sanctions and the precious interests of religion, we are always disposed to watch with unusual jealousy, and to guard with unusual firmness. Hence arises the necessity which every impostor is under of adapting his schemes to the preconceived notions of those whom he designs to mislead. The most careless observer cannot but remark, that this spirit of accommodation strongly distinguishes the conduct of Mahomet, and the character of his religion. With the Jew he maintained the inspiration of Moses, the authority of the Pentateuch, and of the prophetic writings. With the Christian he admitted the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and the truth of the gospel. He even attempted to found his own pretensions on the preceding revelations of Moses and of Christ; and professed, with much plausibility, that he was sent to purify a religion, which originally came down from heaven, from the pollutions it had unhappily contracted during its residence among a

frail and degenerate race of beings ; to shut the book ; to close the seal of prophecy ; and to communicate the last gracious offers of divine mercy and instruction to sinful man.

To win the affections of his idolatrous countrymen, he indulged their prejudices ; he gave a new and superior sanction to their favourite ceremonies and customs, and adorned them with more pompous and attracting embellishments.

To the original success of this crafty and well-concerted scheme, nothing perhaps more effectually contributed than the extreme and deplorable want of all intellectual culture, under which the far greater part of the Arabians then laboured. Ignorance is ever the strongest and the safest ground on which imposture can be erected. Civilization at that time had made but little progress in Arabia. The art of writing had been known and practised by their countryman Job, and by the tribe of Hamyar, for many centuries before the birth of Mahomet : but even at that late period the rest of the Arabs were totally unacquainted with this useful art. Those of Mecca in particular, to whom the pretended prophet first asserted his divine commission, and proposed his new religion,

were peculiarly distinguished as ignorant and illiterate, even to a proverb.

Accustomed continually to a roving and unsettled life, the greater part of the Arabs carried their literary pursuits no farther than to the composition of rude, though sometimes beautiful verses on the subjects of love or war; or they amused themselves by frequently reciting the favourite works of their most celebrated poets. The pastoral life has ever been deemed favourable to the muses. Accordingly we find that in works of imagination, the Arabs, even in their uncivilized state, were not wholly destitute of merit: but to the profound researches of philosophy, and the laboured deductions of reason, they were of necessity entire strangers.

The ignorance, the doubts, and the uncertainty which universally prevailed among the Arabians, with regard to the immortality of the soul, was also a circumstance which had no inconsiderable influence in the establishment of Mahometism. Many of them absolutely denied the possibility of a future state of existence; and, without the smallest expectation of a resurrection, terminated all their views in the grave. There were others indeed among them, who had conceived a more exalted, and in some respects a juster

idea of human nature; who imagined that death, though it might suspend, yet did not put a final period to man's existence; and who raised their hopes to some happier country, where, after their departure from this world, they should again be called into being. Whether this doctrine had been transmitted to them through the medium of tradition, or whether they had received some intimations of it from the Christians, or the Jews, who were dispersed through the East, is uncertain. But though they might be convinced of their future existence, yet they were totally unable to ascertain the mode of that existence, or to form any rational ideas of the state which was destined to receive them. Their notions of another world seem to have been entirely sensual, and formed only on the model of the present. They imagined that the same passions, the same wants and infirmities which they felt on earth, would still attend them beyond the grave; and believed that even the animals which had contributed to their ease and convenience in the present, would be no less necessary to their happiness in a future life.

Such was the state of the nation, and such were the people, to whom Mahomet first

offered a religion ; which while it retained almost every principle and opinion that immemorial custom had taught them to revere, at the same time held forth new doctrines, the most pleasing and captivating to the human heart. To those among them who presumed not to lift their hopes beyond the present life; but looked forward with sullen acquiescence to the gloomy prospect of annihilation, the promise of an eternal state of existence, to be passed in consummate happiness, could not but afford the strongest and most irresistible attractions. Others who already indulged a faint though pleasing desire of immortality, would embrace with eagerness a clearer and more distinct prospect of futurity; which at once enlarged and confirmed their former hopes.

The Mahometan Paradise was adorned with all the gayest colours of the imagination. A felicity consisting only of pure and spiritual pleasure would have been too refined for the gross and sensual conceptions of the uncivilized tribes of Arabia. Gardens fairer than that of Eden, watered by a thousand streams, and enlivened by the blooming beauties of Paradise, seemed better calculated to excite their desires, and to engage their attention.

While this happiness and these pleasures were thus graciously offered to the faithful, who received and embraced his new religion; the most dreadful torments which imagination could suggest were at the same time denounced against an unbelieving world.

Tempted on the one hand by promises thus specious and alluring, and assailed on the other by new and unheard of terrors, against which his former principles could afford him no certain resource; what wonder is it, that the unlettered Arabian willingly embraced a religion, which thus forcibly addressed itself to his strongest passions? His hopes and fears alike conspired to rouse and to strengthen his faith: and if he could only once persuade himself that the religion which was offered him might possibly be true, the reason even of the most ignorant barbarian would immediately inform him, that in rejecting such a religion he *might* be presumptuous, and in embracing it he *could* not be imprudent.

But further, it was a circumstance which probably had very considerable weight in recommending the religion of Mahomet to his countrymen, and to the world, that the doctrines which he taught were in general the plainest and most simple that can be

imagined ; and that it totally disclaimed all those mysteries, at which the pride of human reason is so apt to revolt. The sacred and mysterious doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, which the religion of Christ first plainly revealed to mankind, has ever been a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to the proud disputers of this world. To this doctrine, because above the reach of human reason, infidelity has often objected ; and presumptuously dared to deny what it could not comprehend : whilst the Christian, satisfied that it is expressly revealed in that religion which he knows to be divine, believes and adores in humble and submissive silence.

But the Unity of God, which forms the grand fundamental doctrine of Mahometism, is also universally admitted as one of the first principles of natural religion. To this doctrine (as has been already observed) the greater part of the Arabians before the time of Mahomet were no strangers : and though in practice they had miserably corrupted themselves, by the worship of inferior agents, yet in belief they still maintained the unity of the Divine nature sacred and inviolate.

We have now taken a short though comprehensive view of the principal causes, which seem to have contributed most mate-

rially to the original success of Mahometism. The means by which it was afterwards so firmly established and so widely propagated through the world are too plain, as well as too generally known, to require either minute discussion, or profound remarks.

No sooner had the insinuating address of the impostor (assisted by that concurrence of favourable circumstances which we have enumerated) enabled him to assemble a party sufficient to support his ambitious designs, than he threw off the mask which was no longer necessary; and, disclaiming the softer arts of persuasion and reasoning, immediately adopted a quicker and more efficacious mode of conversion. It was alleged by the deceiver, that since a disobedient world had disdained or rejected the ineffectual summons which the Divine mercy had sent in former times by the prophets, who came with appeals to the senses and reason of mankind; it had now pleased the Almighty to send forth his last great prophet, by the strength of his arm and by the power of the sword, to compel men to embrace the truth.

Acting under the fancied authority of this divine commission, looking forward with anxious expectation to the joys of Paradise, and the glorious crown of martyrdom which

was laid up for those who should perish in the propagation of the faith, and convinced that their lot, whether of life or death, was absolutely and inevitably predetermined; the first followers of Mahomet were animated with that enthusiastic zeal, which inspires the most invincible contempt of danger and of death.

The fellow-citizens of the impostor, and those of his tribe, to whose immediate charge the sacred temple had long been entrusted, either from principle, or from pride, for a while defended with unshaken zeal, though with various success, the religion of their fathers.

Exhausted, however, by a bloody and unavailing opposition, they were at last compelled to yield to the superior address or more ferocious courage of their adversaries.

The submission of the holy city at once secured the authority, and completed the triumph, of the conqueror.

The senseless objects of Arabian devotion, which ignorance and superstition had raised to the rank of divinities, were now with impetuous and undistinguishing zeal disgraced and demolished. The sacred and venerable character of the temple was however still preserved inviolate; its worship, its ceremo-

nies, and its ordinances were still retained : with this difference only, that they were transferred from inferior and dependent deities, to the one most high and supreme God.

Flattered by this attention to their prejudices and their interests, and influenced by the dread of superior power, the inhabitants of Mecca and its neighbourhood contemplated in silence the disgraceful overthrow of their idols ; and with real or affected readiness flocked to the standard, and bowed before the God of Mahomet.

Possessed of the grand object of his wishes, the impostor no longer scrupled to assume the ensigns of temporal as well as of spiritual dominion ; and, after a solemn inauguration, exacted an oath of fidelity and allegiance from his new subjects. The troops of the imperial prophet were now sent forth through every part of Arabia, prepared alike to convert by instruction, or to subdue by arms, the enemies of the faith. The effects of their zeal and of their courage were soon apparent : the streets of Medina were crowded with ambassadors from various tribes, who came to humble themselves before the conqueror of Mecca, and to acknowledge both the unity of God and the authority of his prophet.

Thus rapidly did the religion of Mahomet triumph over all the opposition of his idolatrous countrymen; and thus was his empire at length firmly established throughout the several provinces of Arabia. But emboldened only, and inflamed, rather than satiated, by such extraordinary success, the aspiring adventurer began to raise his views still higher, and to aim at more extensive dominion.

The territories of the Grecian empire had attracted his attention: and the rich and fertile province of Syria, from its neighbouring situation, was particularly marked out as the next object of his ambitious desires. But while he was thus fortunate in the accomplishment of so great and arduous an enterprise, and thus meditating still greater achievements, we behold death arresting the conqueror in the midst of his honours, and closing at once his victories and his projects.

Insinuating in his manners, and profound in his schemes, he had, however, gained so complete an ascendancy over the minds of his followers, and had settled his power on so solid a foundation, that little remained to be done by his successors, but to pursue the path which he had traced.

The leaders whom he had chosen were

men of distinguished talents and abilities; and from them his immediate successors were elected. When raised to the empire, like the prophet whom they represented, they were invested with supreme power both in temporal and spiritual affairs: and, being animated by a zeal, like his, for the support and propagation of their religion, they faithfully executed his commands, and copied his example.

The Arabians, naturally brave and warlike, had, even in their divided state, resisted with success every exertion of the Roman power. But when the enterprising genius of Mahomet had united their discordant tribes under one common head, had made them unanimous in opinion, conspiring in the same design, and uniting discipline and military skill with religious ardour and enthusiasm; it is easy to imagine, that they must have been extremely formidable, and capable of producing the most extraordinary revolutions in the history of the world. When they beheld their country raised from barbarism and obscurity to power and dominion, national pride began to operate on their minds; and, united with the hopes of plunder from the rich and luxurious provinces of Asia, added new weight to the

commands of their prophet, and contributed much to stimulate their zeal, and animate their exertions.

To oppose these formidable foes, acting upon motives thus forcible, we behold on the one hand an enfeebled empire already sinking under its own weight ; and on the other, a corrupt and divided church, some of whose degenerate sons labour to hasten, whilst others contemplate with indolent indifference, the approaching ruin.

Under these circumstances, the intrepid valour and daring exertions of the Saracens soon shook the throne of the Cæsars : while the emperors, more attentive to theological controversies, than to the dangers which surrounded their government, beheld them, almost without emotion, dismembering the empire, and violently wresting from it the richest and most valuable provinces of Asia and Africa. Egypt, fertile in resources ; Palestine, ever dear and sacred to the Christians, as the scene on which the Son of God had lived and died ; and Syria, celebrated for its wealth and rich productions, were numbered among the first conquests of the Caliphs.

The great and extensive empire of Persia, which had always defied the power, and often insulted with impunity the majesty, of

Rome, after a faint and unavailing resistance, fell an easy prey to the Saracen arms. The religion of the Magi, venerable on account of its high antiquity, which even the conqueror of Darius had spared and respected, was now utterly subverted; while the victorious Koran was triumphantly established on the ruin of its altars. Such was the rapidity with which the arms of the Caliphs overran province after province, and conquered kingdom after kingdom: and thus in less than a century do we behold their empire rootedly fixed over a great part of the Eastern world; and even extended so far as to threaten Europe with the same intolerable bondage.

As religion was the cause and the object of all their conquests, and as the battles they fought were (according to their conceptions) the battles of the Lord; the propagation of their faith naturally kept pace with the extension of their empire.

To their Pagan subjects no other alternative was allowed than an immediate desertion of their former errors, and conversion to the faith, or an instant and cruel death by the hands of a barbarous zealot. To the Christian indeed the policy, rather than the mercy, of his Mahometan conquerors, of-

ferred a somewhat milder choice : he was allowed the peculiar privilege of compounding for the preservation of his religion and his life by the payment of a constant and heavy tribute. What extraordinary efficacy this mode of conversion must have carried with it, to men who had already lost almost every thing but the name of their religion, may easily be imagined. Nor can we wonder, if in this situation of affairs the still small voice of conscience was unheard amidst the cries of interest ; or if temporal ease and security under the banners of a victorious prophet, were preferred to that scandal and inconvenience, to which the religion of a lowly and crucified Saviour now subjected its professors.

From an attentive and impartial consideration of the several particulars which have now been enumerated, it will readily appear, how little force is due to that specious argument for the truth of the Mahometan religion, which has often been drawn by its advocates from the splendid victories and uninterrupted success of its first propagators.

When we behold a man, born to poverty, and all the obscurity of private life, suddenly raising himself to power the most absolute, and uniting the jarring opinions and hostile

tribes of his countrymen in one common faith and government, under himself; when we behold a people, before almost wholly unknown, and unheard of in the annals of history, rushing with unparalleled rapidity to empire and to glory, and establishing at once a new religion, and a new form of government, over a large portion of the habitable world; doubtless our astonishment is excited at such unexpected and interesting events.

But (to repeat what has been before observed) that which is singular and uncommon, is not therefore to be deemed miraculous. Revolutions (however stupendous) which may yet lie within the compass of the human mind, when assisted by external events, to effect, must not rashly, or without good reason, be imputed to the particular and immediate agency of God. Success alone, as we have already shewn, affords no absolute proof of the favour and approbation of the Deity; no evidence of the truth or divine original of any doctrines or opinions.

It is only in particular situations, and under peculiar circumstances, that the argument drawn from success can be allowed to possess any weight; in situations, where no human strength or genius could of itself have

prevailed ; under circumstances, where imposture could never have supported itself amidst the dangers that surrounded it.

Now that this description is by no means applicable to the case of Mahometism, is evident from the foregoing recital : from whence it appears that every circumstance of the times, every particular in the manners and situation of mankind, plainly and forcibly concurred to favour the bold and artful imposture.

The causes of the original success of Mahometism may clearly be traced in the scandalous divisions and deplorable corruptions of the Christian church ; in the political and religious state of Arabia ; in the independence and want of union among its tribes ; in the gross ignorance (particularly with regard to religion) of its barbarous and uncivilized inhabitants ; and lastly, in the nature and genius of Mahometism itself : in the fascinating allurements of its promised rewards, in their agreeableness to the propensities of corrupt nature in general, and to those of the inhabitants of warmer climates in particular ; in the artful accommodation of its doctrines and its rites to the preconceived opinions, the favourite passions, and the deep-rooted prejudices of those to whom it

was addressed; in the poetic elegance with which its doctrines, its precepts, and its histories were adorned; and in the captivating manner in which they were delivered.

As the corrupt and distracted state of the Christian church had originally assisted the rise, so did it operate with still greater force in favour of the subsequent progress of Mahometan imposture. If indeed we allow to this cause its proper influence; if we consider the weakness of the surrounding nations, and the natural strength of Arabia, now collected and pointed to one object; if we reflect on that rage of zeal and that madness of enthusiasm, which were now superadded to the native valour of a hardy and warlike people; we shall cease to wonder at the victories and triumphs they obtained over the lukewarm and degenerate defenders of the gospel.

Of these victories and these triumphs the propagation of their new faith was the professed object and design: thus by violence and bloodshed had the prophet himself finally established his religion among his countrymen; and thus had he expressly commanded his followers to extend it over all the regions of the earth.

Of the continuance of Mahometism, when

thus established, and of its existence to the present times, various causes might be assigned, whose joint operation would be sufficient to account fully for the effect, without having recourse to any miraculous or particular interposition of Providence. Of these causes one only shall be mentioned in this place, and that, because it appears to be of peculiar force and importance.

In all those countries which acknowledge the authority of Mahomet, so intimate is the connection, so absolute the dependence of the civil government on religion, that any change in the latter must necessarily and inevitably involve the ruin and overthrow of the former. The Koran is not, like the Gospel, to be considered merely as the standard by which the religious opinions, the worship, and the practice of its followers are regulated; but it is also a political system; on this foundation the throne itself is erected; from hence every law of the state is derived; and by this authority every question of life and of property is finally decided.

It is obvious therefore, that, in every country where Mahometism had been once received and established, the circumstance which I have now mentioned must have operated with uncommon weight to crush

any important innovation in religion : since from this inseparable connection between the sanctions of religion and those of the state, every such innovation could be considered in no other light, than as an attempt to overturn the civil government, to loosen the bands of society, and to destroy every privilege of law, and every security of property.

Such then being the circumstances, and such the means by which the religion of Mahomet was so widely diffused, and so firmly established in the world, its success, however astonishing, is capable of being accounted for by mere human causes ; and consequently to suppose any extraordinary and particular interposition of the Deity, is evidently unnecessary and absurd. Ultimately, indeed, this awful and memorable change in the religion and manners of so great a part of mankind, like every other human event, must be referred to the overruling providence of that God, whose judgments are unsearchable, and whose ways are past finding out ; whose wisdom uniformly bringeth good out of evil ; and who maketh even the violence of the wicked, and the artifices of the impostor, subservient to the ac-

complishment of his gracious though mysterious designs.

Let not then the Christian be offended, or the infidel triumph at the successful establishment and long continuance of so acknowledged an imposture, as affording any reasonable ground of objection against our holy faith.

Let these events rather be considered as evidences of its truth; as accomplishments of the *general* prediction of our Lord, that *false Christs and false prophets should arise, and should deceive many*; and especially of that *particular* and express prophecy in the revelationsⁱ of his beloved disciple, which has been determined by the ablest commentators to relate to the impostor Mahomet, and to his false and impious religion; which, *arising like a smoke out of the bottomless pit*, suddenly overshadowed the Eastern world, and involved its wretched inhabitants in *darkness* and in error.

ⁱ Rev. ix. 1, &c.

S E R M O N III.

ACTS v. 38, 39.

If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

TO collect and generalize ideas, to give them precision by rules and comprehension by system, is the distinguishing privilege of man. Hence arise those principles, which are of the most extensive and conspicuous use in the calculation of moral probabilities, in the conduct of common life, and in ascertaining both the evidence of facts and the tendency of actions. Hence too proceed alike our virtuous and destructive prejudices; our power of perplexing truth, and of unfolding it. But the utility of general rules invariably and necessarily depends upon a nice and fair adjustment of them to the particular circumstances which they are employed to illustrate. A wide field here opens itself for the vigorous and honest exercise of our intellectual faculties; for the suspension of judgment where the evidences are scanty, or

obscure, or contradictory ; for decided and firm assent where they are numerous, and bright, and consistent. In the mixed state of human affairs, we cannot indeed be too diligent in collecting materials for enquiry ; or too cautious in determining their comparative force, by the standard of general rules. The most ordinary and familiar events are sometimes distinguished by peculiarities, which check the inquisitive mind from hasty and undistinguishing assent. The most extraordinary and complicated, when attentively surveyed, constitute some distinct and general principle, to which similar phenomena may be reduced ; or gradually unfold themselves into a clear and perfect uniformity to those very rules, to which they, on their first appearance, were utterly irreconcilable. From the gross conception, therefore, or the rash application of general maxims, proceed those errors which too fatally seduce, and those difficulties which so often confound, the human understanding. On the contrary, by the dispassionate and just use of them we detect specious imposture, and penetrate into the most improbable, but most important truths.

The propriety of these observations will present itself to every hearer, who opposes

the singular circumstances, under which Mahomet promulgated and established his religion, to the well known, but very perverted maxim, that success is a decisive proof of divine interposition. For this reason, I took occasion in the last discourse to observe, that, in order to accomplish the mysterious designs of his providence, the Deity is often pleased to permit the success of those actions and opinions, which it is contrary to his nature and attributes to approve. This position was more particularly illustrated by the memorable example of the Arabian impostor, whose false and impious pretences to divine revelation were, by the permission of an unsearchable Providence, crowned with an almost unexampled success; and whose pernicious heresy taking deep root, and bearing fruit upwards, is even now suffered to cast its deadly shade over the far greater part of the Eastern world.

But to whatever extent the argument which results from success may have been pushed by the interested patrons of error, or the ill-judging defenders of truth; there are still circumstances, in which it is undoubtedly conclusive. Dangerous as it may be to argue from the success of events, however extraordinary, which the acknowledged interests

and concurring efforts of men may possibly have produced, there is certainly no room for mistake in those which are evidently above the reach of human strength and wisdom, and which have been effected in direct opposition to every earthly power.

When therefore we behold an effect produced, between which and its apparent human causes no ingenuity can trace any probable proportion ; when we perceive a work accomplished by instruments of known and limited powers, which at the same time notoriously exceeds the utmost conceivable extent of those powers ; it is not only just and reasonable, but it is even necessary to acknowledge, that in the finger of God we find the only adequate, and therefore the real and illustrious cause.

In carrying on these reflections to the gradual establishment of the gospel, it will be proper to consider at large the obstacles which opposed its progress in the world, and the character and abilities of its first propagators.

It was the remark of an inspired Apostle concerning the gospel and its first preachers, that God^a *had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak*

^a 1 Cor. i. 27.

things of the world to confound the things that were mighty.

Now to the candid enquirer, who views with attention the various and stubborn difficulties, with which the teachers of Christianity were unavoidably left to struggle; and who considers the insufficiency of the powers which they naturally possessed, to overcome those difficulties, this representation of the Apostle will seem by no means the boast of audacious vanity, or the jargon of wild fanaticism. When the twelve disciples received the last command of their departing Lord, to ^b *go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*; this extraordinary commission to the eye of human reason might well appear the most romantic and visionary. Supposing them, for the present, to have been unassisted from on high; weak and illiterate as they were, could they for a moment presume to hope for the success of so perilous and so arduous an enterprise? Deprived of that protection and support, which the miracles and presence of their Master had hitherto afforded them, their situation was now become the most forlorn and desperate that can possibly be imagined.

^b Matt. xxviii. 19.

Every thing around them wore an appearance dangerous to their persons, and hostile to their cause. In the execution of their extensive office, they had not only to contend with the jealousy of power, and the persecution of authority ; their progress was impeded by foes still more formidable ; by the deep-rooted prejudices, the favourite superstitions, and the darling vices of a corrupted world.

From their countrymen, in particular, as they had nothing to hope, they had every thing to fear. They had to oppose the inveteracy of custom ; and, what was more formidable, the prejudices which arose from that distinction which the Jews had long enjoyed as the favoured people of the most high God ; a distinction which had been supported by a train of events equally gracious and wonderful ; and in some particular instances confirmed by miracles that carried with them the very stamp and seal of omnipotence.

The promise of a Redeemer of Israel, originally made to Abraham the great founder of their nation, repeated afterwards to David, and confirmed by the concurring voice of all their Prophets, had indeed awakened among the Jews an earnest and universal

expectation of the appearance of the Messiah. The same prophecies which foretold the coming, had likewise marked out with peculiar precision every particular concerning the character, the office, and the person of the Saviour. The mysterious union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ was plainly shadowed out, and might have been fairly inferred from these very prophecies; which now pathetically predicted the meanness, the sufferings, and the ignominious death of the Messiah; and now, with all the warmth and boldness of Eastern poetry, painted the temporal grandeur, the victories, and the eternity of his kingdom.

The future Redeemer was frequently and unequivocally described as *despised and rejected of men, as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; as wounded for the transgressions, and bruised for the iniquities of his people*; and lastly, as closing his unexampled distresses and unspotted life, like the sheep led forth in patient and submissive silence to the slaughter.

But unable or unwilling to reconcile these seemingly opposite and contradictory characters, the Jewish nation had long rejected with disdain and abhorrence every idea of

^c Isaiah liii. 3, &c.

an insulted and afflicted Messiah. Seduced by carnal views, and impelled by ambitious hopes, which their frequent captivities and distresses had served only to heighten, they totally overlooked one part of their sacred prophecies, and confined to their strict and literal meaning the animated and figurative expressions of the other. Hence in the person of the Messiah, their promised deliverer, they fondly beheld a mighty and glorious King, who should appear with all the pomp of temporal greatness and all the terrors of earthly power, trampling upon the enemies and the oppressors of Israel, and leading forth his people amidst the triumphs of conquest, and the splendor of dominion.

These expectations, at once so flattering to their pride, and so agreeable to their wishes, had long been cherished with a blind and bigotted fondness, and transmitted with increasing strength through successive generations. The manifest expiration of the time prescribed by the prophets, the departure of the sceptre from Judah, and the subjection of their country to the Roman power, were circumstances which at this time added new weight to the opinion, which had been thus endeared by early prejudice, and sanctified by authoritative tradition. Every heart was

now warmed with hope, and every eye looked forward with anxious expectation to the moment when the glory of Zion should appear, and Judæa be for ever exalted above the kingdoms of the earth; when they should behold suppliant nations crowding into the sanctuary, and Rome herself, the haughty mistress of the world, bowing prostrate at the feet of Jerusalem.

Nor were these glorious expectations confined to the chiefs and rulers of the Jews, whose superior stations seeming to entitle them to the first honours and emoluments of the Messiah's kingdom, might perhaps have induced them more readily to embrace, and more industriously to disseminate, an opinion, which promised so complete a gratification to their ambition. Even the disciples of our Lord, who had been in general selected from the lowest and the meanest of the people, long retained the same delusive opinion, and indulged the same fallacious hopes, with the rest of their countrymen.

Nay, so firmly was this belief impressed upon their minds, that not all the frequent and solemn declarations of their Master to the contrary were ever able to efface it: nor do they seem to have been effectually roused from the pleasing dream of temporal gran-

deur which had captivated their imagination, till his death had tried the constancy of their faith, till his resurrection had revived their drooping spirits, and his ascension into heaven had rectified their errors, and invigorated their resolution.

From this mistaken opinion arose the frequent struggles for superiority among them, which they have so ingenuously recorded: hence the petition of the mother of Zebedee's children: hence too the impatience and misguided zeal of Peter, who, when Christ had pathetically related his approaching humiliation, his sufferings, and his death, took him and began to rebuke him, saying, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not happen unto thee.*

To this may be added the words of one of the disciples with whom our Lord, in his way to Emmaus, conversed after his resurrection, *We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.* This reflection arose from the same prejudice that had long flattered the national vanity; and expresses the most painful sense of disappointment.

When we reflect on the very extraordinary manner in which the divine Being had go-

^a Matt. xvi. 22.

^e Luke xxiv. 21.

verned the Jewish nation, we cannot be surprised that the multitude should be carried away by the infatuation which always accompanies distinction. Emancipation from a superior power is the natural wish of the human heart: and it will be increased, when that power is adverse to the original constitution both of the state in which we are born, and of the church to which we become attached. The fondness which arises from education, and grows up with habit, becomes sanctified by authority: and it often happens, that the very opposition which aims at its depression, eventually establishes its interests in our hearts. We recoil at the indignity which is offered to the object we have been accustomed to regard with veneration: when a host of opponents rises up to sink its credit, or lessen its influence, we summon up new courage to defend the one, and new arguments to justify the other.

The contempt, which the Romans discovered for the ecclesiastical and civil polity of the Jews, aggravated the evils of oppression, and made the yoke of subjection still more grievous and intolerable. Their only hope lay in their promised redemption by the Messiah. To this they looked forward with anxious and eager expectation: and they

considered their past deliverances from the bondage of captivity as the auspicious earnest of their future freedom.

To be disappointed in the attainment of an object which lay so near their hearts, and which had so often soothed the painful sense of subjection to a foreign power, was a circumstance too mortifying and humiliating to be supported by those who were deluded by popular prepossessions, or endowed only with a common share of resignation. Hence we may cease to wonder at the great opposition that was made to the claims of Jesus to the character and office of the Messiah. A person so ignobly descended, so meanly educated, so destitute of those attractions which solicit the notice, and engage the esteem of the world, appeared to human view altogether unqualified for the office he presumed to fill, and totally unworthy of the character he had thought fit to adopt. *Is not this the carpenter's son?* was a question that persons, guided by external appearances, would be ever ready to propose, with a kind of indignant contempt, whenever he declared his embassy as the Son of God, or announced his prerogative as the King of the Jews.

^f Matt. xiii. 55.

The course of our Saviour's life was ill adapted to conciliate the esteem and attention of a people, who were incapable of reconciling a mean appearance with a great design; and who imagined that the interests of heaven needed succour from the splendor of this world. What could such a people, fastidious from false delicacy, and captious from false pride, expect from a man, who had *not where to lay his head*? How could they who were captivated by the dazzling distinctions of birth, and fortune, and rank in the world, associate in all the habits of familiar intercourse with one, whose companions were of the lowest occupations, and who were neither distinguished by the splendor of ancestry, nor the authority of high station? Common pride revolted at the idea of such degradation: and we wonder not that we should find the following question in the mouths of persons, who estimated the goodness of a cause by the external eminence of those who were its abettors, *Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.* As if they had said, "Who are this man's followers and associates? They are such as would of themselves bring

^a Matt. viii. 20.

^b John vii. 48, 49.

discredit on any cause, abstractedly from the consideration of its own merit. Do any of the rulers of the people, any of the great powers of the Sanhedrim, any persons of distinction, either by depth of learning, or dignity of character, do any such persons acknowledge this Jesus, who lays claim to the name of the Messiah ; or attach themselves to him under that exalted and distinguishing character? No. The people who know not the law, who never studied its principles, or who have been accursed and excommunicated for want of a due obedience to its institutions, are the only supporters of this novel sect. On their voice the ignoble founder of it rests his pretensions ; and by their patronage only his presumption is maintained.”

An appeal conducted on such principles as this carries with it more force than a thousand arguments. It flatters the pride of the human heart ; and is level with its lowest and most familiar prejudices. It was particularly well adapted to influence the minds of the Jews, who had been instructed to rely implicitly on the decisions of the elders ; and who had been accustomed, without controversy and without hesitation, to receive the law from the mouth of the priest.

The state of religion among the Jews was, we may easily conceive, inauspicious to the interests of the gospel; and formed an obstacle to its success too powerful for any expedient but a miracle to control. The two great sects into which the Jewish church was divided carried away the bulk of the people: but whatever rivalship subsisted between them, and whatever differences of opinion kept up the distinction of Pharisees and Sadducees, yet both united in opposing the gospel; and each seemed to vie with the other in discovering a most incurable malignity against Christ and his disciples. Here they forgot their mutual jealousy, and lost sight of every inveterate prejudice, and every jarring interest. The gospel, they well knew, looked with an eye equally unfriendly on both sects: and the leaders of each were re-proved with equal firmness and severity by Jesus Christ. He did not flatter the prejudices of either, nor attempt to engage their good will by any arts of accommodation. His doctrine was in direct opposition to the tenets of both; and his example involved a constant reprehension of their practice. He resisted with equal firmness the haughty scepticism of the Sadducee, and the abject superstition of the Pharisee. Against the

one he maintained the doctrine of a future life ; and in the presence of the other he expatiated on the folly of ceremonial observances, and the fallacy of traditional doctrines.

The religion which had been, I may venture to say, substituted in the room of that which was originally delivered to the Jews by God himself, was indeed a motley and incongruous mixture of truth and falsehood, of divine revelation and human invention. Additions had been made to the Mosaic ritual ; and the forms of divine worship were incumbered with a variety of needless and superstitious appendages. The true object of devotion was almost forgotten, and the true spirit of it nearly extinguished, amidst a multiplicity of unauthorized and superfluous ceremonies : and external services had superseded internal and moral purification. Such impositions, however burdensome, were yet readily submitted to by persons, who had been taught to regard them as substitutes for moral duties. To cleanse the body by daily ablutions, was far more easy than to preserve the purity of the heart by habitual virtue. To abstain from certain meats and drinks, required less resolution and fewer conflicts, than to curb the impetuosity of

appetite, and to resist the allurements of voluptuousness.

The original law, given to this people, encouraged no idea of a dispensation from any call of moral duty under the pretence of ceremonial observances. It inculcated the absolute necessity as well of internal as external holiness; and instructed the Jews always to regard sacrifice as subordinate to mercy. It forbid any to flatter themselves with the hope of acceptance for the sake of the former, while the obligations of the latter were disregarded or violated: and whenever the Jews perverted the design of divine institutions, or lost sight of the great objects which these institutions were appointed to promote, then did God by his prophets warn them of their fatal mistake; and even spoke of ceremonies which he had himself prescribed, in terms, I had nearly said, of degradation and contempt.

At the time when our blessed Lord began to announce his mission as the Messiah, the pernicious sentiment respecting the efficacy of ceremonial obedience had an almost universal prevalence over the minds of the Jews. It was not merely the sentiment of the ignorant vulgar; but it had the sanction of ecclesiastical authority to give it credit and

countenance. The key of knowledge was kept in the hands of men, whose interest it was to conceal it from the people. Hence they became ignorant of the more spiritual and substantial parts of religion, and flattered themselves with the most delusive hopes, in the midst of the most flagrant breaches, and even the most corrupt misrepresentations, of the divine commands. The more plain, which were also the more interesting parts of the law, were veiled and misconstrued, debased and mutilated, by the Scribes and Elders ; whose false glosses had obscured the very fundamental principles of divine worship, and moral obligation: and who, by calling off the attention of men from *weighty matters* to trifling and indifferent circumstantials, had, as our Lord himself informed them, *made the word of God of none effect through their traditions*. Their own whimsical speculations or arbitrary positions had usurped the seat of inspired doctrine: they were more assiduous to amuse the imagination with the dreams of the Rabbins, than to impress the heart with those principles, which have the best tendency to promote a holy and upright conduct, amidst the various situations and trials of life. For

ⁱ Mark vii. 13.

these reasons our Lord upbraided them for the indiscriminate regard which they paid to undoubted revelation and dubious tradition: and, in consequence of their intermixing the most absurd and trifling ceremonies with the more solemn and authorized acts of religious service, he said to them, *^kIn vain do ye worship God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

The Jews, from the beginning, had been taught to connect religion with places as well as persons; and to affix that kind of sanctity to the former, as well as to pay that reverence to the latter, which weak minds would be very apt to apply to all the purposes of superstition; and which policy would be sure to employ as an instrument of securing the most implicit submission to all its prescriptions.

This people had first an ark built as the symbol of the Divine presence: in a more splendid period of their history the temple was erected; where they were instructed to perform the more solemn rites of religious worship.

Accustomed so much to connect the Deity with symbols, and his worship with times and places, there was nothing more

^k Mark vii. 7.

mortifying to their pride, or more irreconcilable to their prejudices, than that doctrine which inculcated such worship of ¹*the Father in spirit and in truth*, as was quite independent of all the forms, which authority had sanctified, and custom had familiarized : a doctrine which was regarded as a kind of blasphemy against the temple, by lessening its importance, and even superseding its necessity.

As the law of Moses was of divine institution, it deserved and demanded the most serious regards : and to slight any of its services, was to insult the authority which enjoined them. The veneration that was inspired by the sense of its original was perfectly right in its principle ; though superstition had engrafted on it many false and ridiculous opinions. As the law was allowed to be divine, we need not wonder that it was universally believed by this people to be perpetual also. The same prejudices, therefore, would in different circumstances lead the Jews to act differently : at one moment they perverted the law by human invention, and in the next they inferred its immutability from its divine origin. What then could they think of a teacher, who, while professing

¹ John iv. 23.

his mission from God, introduced a religion which abrogated institutions confessedly derived from the same God?

When we reflect on the general state of the Jewish church, and the particular principles which prevailed among the different orders of which it was composed, and the different sects into which it was divided; when we consider what were their modes of worship, and what their habits of life; how inveterate their prejudices, and how flattering their expectations; how stubborn was their pride, which arose from their distinction, and how tenacious of all those privileges, which were the emblems of that distinction; when we revolve these considerations in our minds, instead of being surprised at the opposition, which the Jews of all ranks and denominations made to Jesus Christ; we may rather wonder that a man should arise among them, who should attempt to lay the foundation of a new religion on the overthrow of all that had been held sacred and venerable for ages; a religion which subverted national distinctions, instead of establishing them; which mortified national pride, instead of cherishing it; which corrected every inveterate error; which swept away all the idle incumbrances of external rites; and stripped of its

imaginary sanctity even the temple of Jerusalem.

What had a religion such as this to expect from the people to whom it was first preached? What, but all the contempt that vanity could manifest; and all the opposition which malice could effect?

On the other hand, what could inspire in the breast of him that preached it, a confidence of success, but the wisdom of God? And what, but the power of God, could give that success?

As the gospel had the most formidable opposition to struggle with from the people to whom it was first preached, so was it called to a conflict equally arduous, and to human appearance unavailing and desperate, with the rest of mankind, who were professedly included in the grand and extensive object it had in view. Its design was the most liberal that humanity could have wished, or benevolence could have planned. But while its extent gave disgust to the Jews, whose selfishness could not bear to see that grace made universal, which they had hitherto fondly considered as appropriated and peculiar to themselves; so, on the other hand, the rewards which this grace was designed to bestow, and the means by which

individuals might participate of its blessings, were such as were neither suited to the taste of the Gentiles, nor reconcileable with their customs, principles, or pursuits.

At the time when Christ appeared, the Roman empire had reached the very meridian of its glory. It was the illustrious period, when power and policy, receiving aid from learning and science, and embellishment from the orators and the poets, gave law to the world, directed its taste, and even controlled its opinions. It was the age when enquiry was awake and active on every subject that was supposed to be of curious or useful investigation, whether in the natural or the intellectual world. It was, in short, such an age as imposture must have found in every respect the least auspicious to its designs ; especially such an imposture as Christianity, if it had deserved the name.

But to represent in the strongest light the great disadvantages under which the gospel laboured at its first publication, it will be proper to give a short view of the state of philosophy and religion among the Gentiles at that period.

With respect to the former, there were principles common to the various classes and professions into which the unbounded

licence of fancy and speculation had divided it, which were in the highest degree hostile to the simplicity of Christian faith, and to the purity of Christian practice. Viewed merely in theory, it justly merited the censure passed on it by the Apostle ; and, considered in a practical light, it deserved still severer reprehension. At best it was ^m *vain deceit* : for, whether it reasoned on metaphysics or theology ; on God, or nature ; its positions were arbitrary, and its conclusions fallacious. Far removed from the simple and pure dictates of common sense, it involved itself in intricacies that tended to embarrass the understanding : and while it amused the genius of speculation, it either seduced the judgment into a rash and stubborn dogmatism, or infused doubts which led to an universal scepticism. Bold and daring in enquiries beyond the sphere of reason, it affected to explain what it could not comprehend, or presumed to condemn what it could not account for. Hence sprung philosophers, who erected systems of what was ⁿ *falsely called science*, according to their particular prejudices ; and who made partial appearances the criteria of general principles. Shall we wonder that men, who in-

▪ Col. ii. 8.

▪ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

dulged their fancies in such excursions into the unbounded wilds of speculation, ° *became vain in their imaginations; and that their foolish heart was darkened?*

But their philosophy was not merely vain; it was pernicious also. It not only deluded the understanding, but corrupted the heart. It unsettled the very first principles of virtue and religion; it weakened, if not totally destroyed, their best motives; and rendered their most powerful sanctions, if not absolutely abortive, yet at least uncertain.

Carrying its presumptuous and ungoverned speculations into the very essence of the Divinity, and straining its eager sight to penetrate the pavilion of darkness which encircles the eternal throne, it first doubted, and at length denied the existence of a First Cause independent of nature, and of a Providence that superintends its laws, and governs the concerns of mankind.

That great doctrine, which is the most powerful guardian of virtue and religion, and which of all others has the most effectual tendency to influence our hopes and fears, I mean the doctrine of a future state, was totally rejected by the greater part of the Pagan philosophers; and rendered doubtful

and equivocal by their most distinguished moralists. It was taught, and even enforced by legislators from motives of policy ; while to philosophy was reserved the privilege of contradicting it in the schools.

Some of the philosophers, indeed, contended for a future existence, in which no moral dispensation of rewards and punishments was to take place ; for after the expiration of the Great Year the Stoics supposed, that the same system would arise ; after the general conflagration, the same train of events would follow ; the same number of beings exist, and act in the same circumstances ; the same virtues be depressed, and the same vices triumphant, in endless and unalterable succession.

Even those who may be justly esteemed the wisest and most virtuous that the Pagan world could boast of, in effect overthrew the doctrine they have been supposed to patronize. They defended its influence on human conduct, by admitting it only under the idea of a re-union with the nature of the Deity ; the great eternal ONE, from whom all souls proceed, and into whose all-comprehending essence they are at death resolved again ; and, like a bubble burst and lost in the parent ocean, are swallowed up

in the immensity of God ; and thus all personal identity and separate consciousness are for ever extinguished. This is the sublime of Pagan philosophy, exalted by the joint power of metaphysics and theology !

The superstitions of the Heathen world were as opposite to the genius of Christian worship, as its philosophy was adverse to the principles of its faith. They were such as were repugnant to every rule of devotion laid down by our blessed Lord. They were such as could not be mixed with the Christian rites by any arts of accommodation ; by any modes of melioration, or refinement. On the contrary, they were altogether to be rejected ; and the very foundation on which they were reared and supported was to be totally destroyed. For the worship which was established in the Pagan world was not merely absurd ; it was impious in the extreme. It was debauched by an idolatry, which had a multiplicity of the most execrable divinities for its objects. The gods of the heathen, who at best were but just lifted above humanity, were in a thousand instances sunk below it, by crimes that were a disgrace to nature, and by cruelties that would shock even the most barbarous savage. Those rites which policy had consecrated to their al-

tars, and which ignorance revered with stupid admiration, frequently degenerated into scenes of madness, lasciviousness, and cruelty. Their oracles, their auguries, and their sacrifices ; their public spectacles, and splendid games ; yea, the whole apparatus of Pagan superstition were the engines of political tyranny, and of popular delusion, and barred all access to the entrance of truth and freedom, purity and simplicity.

To the opposition which arose on these grounds, we may add another source of dislike, which prevailed more especially among the subjects of the Roman empire, to the Founder, and the first preachers, of the Christian religion.

They were Jews : and of all characters, that of a Jew was the most despised and abhorred among the Gentiles. The distinction which this people claimed was offensive and mortifying to other nations : and the contrariety of their civil customs and modes of worship to the practice of the whole world, rendered them the objects of universal detestation. A religion originating with a Jew, and supported by persons of the same character, had, independently of every other circumstance, but little prospect of gaining proselytes among the Gentiles ; especially Gentiles of the more

polished states. They would naturally associate with it their ideas of the Jewish character; and the abhorrence excited by the one would be extended, without hesitation and without distinction, to the other.

I have thus attempted to set before you some of the principal causes of the opposition which was made to the first propagation of Christianity.

The success of the gospel in the time of our blessed Lord was truly astonishing, if we consider who he was, and what he had to encounter. But its more rapid and extensive propagation after his death is a circumstance that excites still higher admiration.

Destitute of all human advantages, protected by no authority, assisted by no art; not recommended by the reputation of its Author, not enforced by eloquence in its advocates, *the word of God grew mightily and prevailed.* Twelve men, poor, and artless, and illiterate, we behold triumphing over the fiercest and most determined opposition; over the tyranny of the magistrate, and the subtleties of the philosopher; over the prejudices of the Gentile, and the bigotry of the Jew. They established a religion, which held forth high and venerable mysteries, such as the pride of man would induce him to suspect, because

he could not perfectly comprehend them ; which preached doctrines pure and spiritual, such as corrupt nature was prone to oppose, because it shrunk from the severity of their discipline ; which required its followers to renounce almost every opinion they had embraced as sacred, and every interest they had pursued as important ; which even exposed them to every species of danger and infamy ; to persecution unmerited and unpitied ; to the gloom of a prison, and to the pangs of death. Hopeless as this prospect might appear to the view of short-sighted man, the gospel yet emerged from the obscurity in which it was likely to be overwhelmed by the complicated distresses of its friends, and the unrelenting cruelty of its foes. It succeeded in a peculiar degree, and in a peculiar manner : it derived that success from truth ; and obtained it under circumstances, where falsehood must have been detected and crushed.

In vain therefore has the insidious ingenuity of the infidel and sceptic been employed in the preposterous endeavour of accounting for the miraculous success of Christianity from causes merely human. The true philosopher, who will rest satisfied with no cause but what is fully adequate to the

effects produced, readily acknowledges the assistance of God, in the witness he bare to the preaching of the Apostles, by many signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

The rational advocate for Christianity scorns to shelter himself in sceptical and disingenuous misrepresentation. He knows the force of secondary causes; he with well-founded exultation employs them as additional arguments for the soundness of his faith; he derives the strongest support from their admirable and striking consistence with the pretensions of a religion, which disclaimed the use of those engines by which imposture is usually maintained, the intrigues, I mean, of policy, and the violence of arms. But he at the same time contends, that while the interests of the gospel were promoted by those circumstances which must have been fatal to every false religion, they were chiefly and primarily promoted by other and more efficacious methods; by the power of God, which enabled the Founder of Christianity to perform what unaided man never performed; and by the wisdom of God, which assisted him in speaking as man never spake.

A living writer, the elegance of whose style seems to have conferred a very alarm-

ing popularity on the licentiousness of his opinions, has assigned the reception of Christianity to FIVE CAUSES ; each of which he has represented as in reality unconnected with any divine interposition.

First, “^p the inflexible and intolerant zeal
“ of the first Christians, derived from the
“ Jews, but purified from the unsocial spirit,
“ which had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses.”

Now zeal which is at once intolerant, and purified from any unsocial spirit, is a quality, which we leave it to the singularity of this writer to conceive, and to his eloquence to describe.

But we deny the fact, that any kind or any degree of intolerance existed among the primitive Christians : and as to their zeal, we maintain that it did not bear the slightest similitude to the fierceness and bigotry of the Jews. It was derived from very different causes, and aimed at far nobler ends. It was not the narrow and temporal interests of one nation, but the general reformation and the spiritual happiness of the whole world, which the teachers of Christianity were anxious to promote. That firmness, which may

^p Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, p. 536. edit. 4to. 1777.

be misconstrued into intolerance, and that activity, which we are content to call by the name of zeal, had, in the usual course of human affairs, a tendency to retard, rather than to facilitate, the propagation of the gospel. The Christian, instead of falling into the fashionable and popular intercommunity of worship, disdained, amidst the terrors of impending death, to throw incense on the altar of Jupiter: he boldly pronounced the whole system of Pagan mythology imposture; and charged the whole ritual of its external devotions with grovelling superstition, and profane idolatry.

A second Cause he finds “in the doctrine of a future life.” Such a doctrine, doubtless, is congenial to the nature of man as an accountable and moral agent; it is repeatedly insisted upon in the gospel; and must ultimately, and in a favourable state of things, have increased its efficacy. But the future life taught by the Apostles had few recommendations in the sight of the Heathen world. It was offensive to the Epicureans by the punishments it threatened: it was not attractive to the vulgar by the very rewards which it proposed. The pride of the philosopher was shocked by the doctrine of a resurrection, the mode of which he was unable

to comprehend: the imaginations of other men were feebly impressed by the representation of a future state, which did not hold out the serene sky, the verdant garden, and the luxurious enjoyments of an Elysium.

A third Cause he finds in “the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church;” and then proceeds, in a style of the most contemptuous and bitter derision, to insinuate that these powers were never possessed.

Now the hardest adversaries of the gospel, a Porphyry, a Celsus, and a Julian, do not deny the existence of those miracles: and Christianity has little to fear from the improbable causes to which these writers impute them.

It is however worthy of remark, that when Christianity was published, a general prejudice in the people, and a very severe spirit of suspicion in the government, prevailed against the belief of Miracles. They were stigmatized by the opprobrious appellation of *Magic*: and Augustus, it is well known, had published very rigorous edicts against the whole race of Præstigiators.

The peculiar difficulties, which obstructed the reception of Christian miracles, have been explained with great acuteness of reasoning, and great depth of erudition, by a modern

writer, whose remarks defeat indeed the fallacies, but seem to have escaped the notice of our ingenious and indefatigable historian.

The sum of his arguments I will give in his own words. “^a The multitude of popular
“ gods admitted amongst the Heathens did
“ by necessary consequence occasion such
“ a multitude of pretended miracles, that
“ they insensibly *lost* their force, and *sunk*
“ in their esteem. Though the philosophers
“ in general, and men of reading and con-
“ templation, could not but discover the gross-
“ ness and absurdity of the Civil Religion;
“ yet this could have little effect on the *Vul-*
“ *gar*, or *themselves*: not on the *Vulgar*, be-
“ cause it was the business of the wisest and
“ most politic heads zealously to support and
“ encourage them in their practices; not
“ on *themselves*, because, if they despised
“ their Gods, they must despise their Mira-
“ cles too.”

Now under these circumstances, miracles *ascribed* to the first propagators of Christianity, must have created an immediate and stubborn prejudice against their cause: and nothing could have subdued that prejudice, but miracles really and visibly performed.

^a Weston on the Rejection of Christian Miracles by the Heathen, p. 348.

A fourth Cause is “the virtues of the first Christians:” which are themselves reduced to a mean and timid repentance for former sins, and to an impetuous zeal in supporting the reputation of the sect newly embraced.

But surely in the eyes of the haughty and jealous Romans, such repentance and such zeal must have equally excited opposition to Christianity. The first would have provoked contempt among persons of their daring self-sufficiency; and the other would have awakened the jealousy of the magistrate. True it is, that the Christians had virtues of a nobler kind. It is also true, that those virtues did ultimately triumph over the scorn and malice of their foes: and it is true, that a religion producing such effects on its followers, and deriving success from such means, carries with it a presumptive proof, of which imposture never could boast.

The last secondary Cause mentioned by this writer is “the union and discipline of the Christian church.”

We acknowledge the force of union in securing the order, and enlarging the interests of every society; and we heartily wish, that such union could be found in the earlier ages of the gospel. But the distractions and internal divisions of the Christians pre-

sent a very different prospect. And if the gospel succeeded, not only amidst the furious assaults of its enemies, but the no less violent contentions of its friends, we must look for its success in some other cause, than those which our historian has assigned.

Observations similar to these have been most properly produced, and most ably enforced by various writers, who have repelled the base and disingenuous assaults of this most dangerous enemy. But in reviewing the circumstances which attended the propagation of the gospel, I could not, consistently with the spirit of this Institution, avoid taking some notice of his treacherous and insidious endeavours to undermine this important argument for the truth of our faith: nor could I neglect so favourable an opportunity as the present, of cautioning the younger part of my audience against being unwarily seduced into an approbation of his sentiments, by the insinuating arts of his sophistry, and the captivating graces of his language.

We are by no means insensible to the merits of our historian; but at the same time we know and lament his eagerness to throw a veil over the deformities of the Heathen theology, to decorate with all the splendor of

panegyric the tolerant spirit of its votaries, to degrade by disingenuous insinuation, or by sarcastic satire, the importance of revelation, to exhibit in the most offensive features of distortion the weakness and the follies of its friends, and to varnish over the cruelties, and exalt the wisdom of its merciless and unrelenting enemies.

I shall now conclude this discourse by briefly enumerating a few particulars, which have been already offered to your consideration in the course of these enquiries into the rise and propagation of Mahometism and Christianity.

It has been already shewn, from the express and universal testimony of history, that every circumstance of the times, every particular in the manners and situation of mankind, plainly and undeniably concurred to favour the success of Mahometan imposture.

We have now seen from the same undoubted authority, that the religion of Christ, at its first appearance in the world, (humanly speaking,) laboured under all possible disadvantages ; and that every apparent probability was strongly and decisively against its success.

The gospel was not, like the Mahometan

imposture, proposed to a people rude and uncivilized, or at a time when universal ignorance and barbarism had prepared mankind to receive, without hesitation, any impressions from the artful and designing; but in an age, which perhaps above all others was distinguished for curious speculation, and philosophical research. The Roman empire was at that time in its full glory; and a long and profound peace, together with the patronage and encouragement of authority, had contributed to raise the arts and sciences to a height unknown before; and which later ages, with all their boasted improvements, have scarce been able to exceed. At such a period did the religion of Christ invite, and endure, the test of the severest scrutiny: till, at length, like pure gold, it came forth unsullied, and undiminished from the flames.

We have observed that the Arabian impostor owed much of his success to the artful accommodation of his religion to the ruling passions, the favourite opinions, and the inveterate prejudices of his countrymen. But the gospel presented itself to mankind with a severer and a chaster aspect. Far from condescending to flatter the appetites and passions, it strictly enjoined its followers the hard and unpleasing task of plucking

out even the eye, and cutting off the hand, that gave occasion of offence. Far from seeking to recommend itself to popular favour by complying and accommodating tenets; it directly and openly opposed almost every opinion and every prejudice of those to whom it was offered.

The great and powerful principle of national pride, which pleaded strongly in favour of the pretensions of Mahomet, formed one of the most stubborn and formidable obstacles that opposed the progress of the gospel.

Called forth to fight the battles of the Lord against an unbelieving world, and confident of victory from the promise of a divine assistance for ever at hand, the Arabian beheld in the religion of his warlike prophet the grand and only instrument which could raise his country from obscurity to glory, from weakness and contempt to power and dominion.

But to the Jewish people Christianity presented no such flattering views. Its grand and fundamental doctrine, faith in an humble, suffering Messiah, obscured the brightest prospects, and overthrew the fairest opinions, which a long and uninterrupted tradition, apparently supported by prophecy, had taught

them to entertain. Their first step towards embracing the gospel was founded on the ruin of every hope which ambition had inspired; and previously to their conversion, they were called upon for ever to renounce their dearest expectations of brilliant conquests and unbounded dominion under the auspicious guidance of a mighty and triumphant deliverer. They could not therefore look but with indignation on the progress of a religion, which tended to deprive them of their peculiar privileges and distinctions; to confound them again with the mass of mankind; and to reduce them from that haughty preeminence which they had hitherto claimed, to the same level with the surrounding nations, whom they had been accustomed to shun with pious abhorrence, or to spurn with sullen contempt.

By an artful intermixture of the favourite ceremonies and fantastic rites of Arabian idolatry with the new modes of worship, which he enjoined; and by a studied accommodation of his style and manner to the prevailing passion for the language and ornaments of poetry, the sagacious impostor facilitated the reception of his doctrines among his countrymen.

But the religion of Jesus Christ could

boast no such advantages. As it opposed the pride and the prejudices of the Jews, so was it equally hostile to every prepossession of the Gentiles.

To the vulgar, attached as they were to the licentious festivals, the solemn processions, and the pompous pageantries of heathenism, the pure and spiritual worship of Christianity displayed no charms; while the more enlightened among them, enamoured of the subtleties of human wisdom, and bewildered in the mazes of an absurd and unintelligible philosophy, were unwilling to believe that the plainness and simplicity of the gospel could ever be worthy an omniscient God.

Lastly, the gospel was not, like the imposture of Mahomet, imposed upon the subject nations by the stern command of a conquering tyrant; nor was it for the space of full three hundred years even indirectly countenanced by any influence of government and authority: on the contrary, we behold with astonishment the pomp of adverse power, no less than the pride of learning, and the arrogance of philosophy, resisting its influence by a long and persevering persecution, but bowing at length before the plain and artless preaching of the poor, the weak, the illiterate fishermen of Galilee.

To such stupendous effects an adequate cause must be assigned.

A revolution so astonishing, accomplished by instruments so evidently weak and disproportioned, and under circumstances so adverse and unfavourable, naturally teaches us to look higher; to elevate our views far above the reach of human strength and wisdom, even to that Almighty Being, *from whom alone cometh every good and every perfect gift.*

To such stupendous effects an adequate cause must be assigned. A revolution so astonishing, accomplished by instruments so evidently weak and ill-proportioned, and under circumstances so adverse and unfavorable, naturally teaches us to look higher; to elevate our views far above the reach of human strength and wisdom, even to that Almighty Being, from whom alone cometh every good and every perfect gift. Let us then, O my friends, let us avail us of this opportunity, and let us not be content with a superficial view of the things of this world, but let us penetrate into the secret springs of the divine government, and let us see how the great God, who is the author of all our mercies, is also the author of all our calamities. Let us see how he is the author of the redemption of our souls, and how he is the author of the punishment of our sins. Let us see how he is the author of the resurrection of the dead, and how he is the author of the judgment of the living. Let us see how he is the author of the glory of his church, and how he is the author of the shame of his enemies. Let us see how he is the author of the peace of his people, and how he is the author of the war of his foes. Let us see how he is the author of the life of his saints, and how he is the author of the death of his wicked. Let us see how he is the author of the joy of his elect, and how he is the author of the sorrow of his reprobate. Let us see how he is the author of the triumph of his kingdom, and how he is the author of the defeat of his adversaries. Let us see how he is the author of the victory of his army, and how he is the author of the rout of his enemies. Let us see how he is the author of the conquest of his city, and how he is the author of the destruction of his foes. Let us see how he is the author of the salvation of his people, and how he is the author of the damnation of his wicked. Let us see how he is the author of the glory of his church, and how he is the author of the shame of his enemies. Let us see how he is the author of the peace of his people, and how he is the author of the war of his foes. Let us see how he is the author of the life of his saints, and how he is the author of the death of his wicked. Let us see how he is the author of the joy of his elect, and how he is the author of the sorrow of his reprobate. Let us see how he is the author of the triumph of his kingdom, and how he is the author of the defeat of his adversaries. Let us see how he is the author of the victory of his army, and how he is the author of the rout of his enemies. Let us see how he is the author of the conquest of his city, and how he is the author of the destruction of his foes. Let us see how he is the author of the salvation of his people, and how he is the author of the damnation of his wicked.

S E R M O N IV.

JOHN vii. 12.

Some said, He is a good man : others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people.

THERE is a strong and active curiosity in the human mind, which ever prompts us to enquire into the lives and characters of men, whose names have been rendered famous for the extraordinary events of which they have been the instruments, and by the important revolutions which they have occasioned in the world. From the proper and temperate indulgence of this principle, however its exertions may have been sometimes condemned as useless and unprofitable, many and solid advantages may be derived to the cause of knowledge and of truth. The connection which subsists between the history of every event, and the character of its author, is obvious ; they reflect reciprocal light on each other ; and it is only by an attentive investigation of both, that we can be enabled to discover with certainty the motives which

influenced the attempt, and the means by which it was accomplished.

But in those speculations of more awful importance, which regard the spiritual and eternal welfare of mankind; when we are called upon to examine the pretensions of those who have laid claim to divine inspiration, and immediate commission from the Deity; there is not only a propriety, but also a necessity for enquiring with minuteness into the character of persons, who have assumed so high and venerable an office. From such an enquiry into the life of the founder may be deduced no mean or indecisive evidence of the truth or falsehood of his religion; and by contemplating his conduct in the different situations and circumstances in which he was placed, we may be enabled to trace plain and unequivocal marks of real or pretended inspiration; and thus to form our judgment, whether it was obedience to the commands of God, or compliance with the dictates of worldly interest, that influenced and directed his actions.

In surveying the life of Mahomet, we cannot but observe with much surprise the opposite and contradictory characters under which he has been represented by historians, who from different motives, and with differ-

rent views, have transmitted to posterity the most irreconcilable accounts of the same public and memorable events. In the various writings of his numerous followers the character of the prophet is uniformly drawn in the brightest and most amiable colours; he is held up as the unrivalled pattern of every mental and corporeal perfection; and as distinguished by every quality and virtue which can adorn and elevate human nature. But far different is the portrait which has been generally exhibited of this remarkable person by Christian historians. Struck with horror at the consequences of his imposture, they have thought it incumbent on them to set no bounds to their hatred of the impostor. Hence they have boldly questioned his intellectual, as well as his moral faculties: they have represented him as not less contemptible on account of his abject stupidity, than detestable for his vices; and language itself has seemed to labour under the difficulty of expressing with sufficient strength their ideas of the complicated guilt and baseness of his character. Thus have Christian writers described the man, whom the greater part of the inhabitants of the Eastern world has for more than eleven hundred years blindly revered as the most accomplished of mortals,

and the most sacred of prophets. But if we would obtain just and true notions of this extraordinary character, we must equally avoid the enthusiasm of the one, and the prejudices of the other ; we must not admit, but with great limitation, either the undistinguishing censures of his opposers, or the exaggerated encomiums of his infatuated adherents.

It may be observed, that the immoderate and unqualified zeal of Christian writers has often led them into unjustifiable extremes, which have injured the cause they stood forth to defend. Their representations of the impostor, by the harsh colouring and distorted features, evidently betray the pencil of an enemy. They have studiously magnified every vice, and aggravated every circumstance, which tended in any degree to degrade or to blacken his character ; and where the description seemed imperfect, the aid of fiction has been sometimes called in, to give a shade and colouring to the outlines of reality and truth. But truth approves not, nor requires such disingenuous arts for its defence. Even if we admit the most favourable character of the pretended prophet, which has been drawn by his enthusiastic followers, objections may still be raised to

his bold and impious pretensions ; objections too strong, I am confident, for ingenuity to solve, or sophistry to elude.

Besides, it was probably forgotten by these warm, though mistaken defenders of the Christian cause, that by thus representing Mahomet as a perfect monster of ignorance and vice, they have in reality rendered his success little less than miraculous ; and very difficult at least, if not absolutely impossible, to be accounted for by any human means. The man who could project, and execute with success, so bold and hazardous an enterprize as that of subverting the religious and civil government of his country, and establishing in their place a system of his own, could never have been despicable for littleness of spirit or weakness of understanding. Reason compels us to suppose, that such an impostor, however favoured by circumstances, must doubtless have possessed superior talents, to enable him to deceive his countrymen, to captivate their affections, and to triumph over the external obstacles that opposed him. Nor is it easy to conceive, that he could ever have supported the severe character of the great reformer of mankind, whose morals were not specious at least, according to those ideas of morality which pre-

vailed among the people to whom his pretensions were immediately proposed. Whatever his real character might have been, whatever the secret propensities of his heart, some small share of hypocrisy, some little regard to external decorum, must have been indispensably requisite to insure his success.

If we thus arbitrarily divest the impostor of those qualities and abilities, which, on the supposition of ordinary and moral causes, were essentially necessary to the accomplishment of his designs, our reasoning is at once reduced to a manifest absurdity. For, if the natural means of his success were wanting, it can only be ascribed to divine. And thus might the impious, with some shew of reason, accuse the Almighty of injustice and of caprice: of injustice, in having by his immediate interposition led millions of his creatures into the most deplorable error: of caprice, in having now in part destroyed by violence that revelation, which he had six hundred years before controlled the course of nature to establish by many signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. Let us therefore, instead of studying to cast an unnecessary gloom over the character of Mahomet, rather choose that part to which reason and probability incline; and let us admit without reserve his

abilities and his virtues, to the utmost extent that, consistently with truth, can possibly be allowed to them. Nor let it be from hence imagined, that we are animated by any desire to palliate the vices, or to aggrandize the character of the prophet; since under this fair outside, this specious disguise, we shall probably be enabled to point out strong and indisputable marks of the most infamous imposture.

Doubtless amidst all the characters of great and extraordinary men, who in the various ages and nations of the world have raised themselves by superior talents above the rest of mankind, and by the force of genius alone have effected the most memorable changes in the course of human affairs; no one presents itself to the philosopher as a more curious or interesting subject of investigation than that of the pretended prophet of Arabia.

Animated by an ambition which dared to attempt, and supported by abilities which qualified him to conduct the most arduous designs, we behold him suddenly starting up from the shade of obscurity; projecting with consummate art, and at length accomplishing with success, a revolution, which from its very nature, no less than from its important

and extensive consequences, may be justly ranked amongst the most stupendous which history has recorded. When we consider the point from which he set out, and the height to which he rose ; when we contemplate the greatness of that empire, and the extent of that religion which he founded ; our astonishment is excited as well by the splendid talents and the profound artifice of the impostor, as by the blind compliance and abject credulity of the multitudes whom he deceived.

The circumstances, which attended the earlier years of Mahomet, were certainly such as presented no flattering prospects of grandeur, and no probable views of ambition to his future life. Though descended from the most honourable tribe of Arabia, and from the noblest family of that tribe, yet distress and poverty were the only portion which he inherited ; a distress and poverty unsoftened by the tender cares, and kind indulgence, of parental affection.

The education which he received, like that of the rest of his countrymen, was rough and hardy ; neither tempered by the elegancies of literature, nor even enlightened by the first and most obvious rudiments of knowledge, but calculated rather to invigorate the powers

of the body, than to polish and enlarge the mind. The bounty of nature, however, and the exquisite endowments with which she had so liberally adorned the future prophet and monarch of Arabia, abundantly compensated for the unkindness of fortune. Graceful in his person, easy and insinuating in his manners, and endowed with a greatness of mind which could brave the storms of adversity, and rise superior to the disadvantages of an illiterate education; he was in possession of accomplishments more valuable in themselves, and capable of producing more illustrious effects, than all that the influence of wealth, or the authority of hereditary power, could have bestowed.

But if Mahomet, deprived of the usual means of cultivation and improvement, was, during the earlier years of his life, left solely to the guidance of untutored nature; he at a more advanced age enjoyed the most favourable opportunities of acquiring a species of information far more conducive to the success of his subsequent designs, than the maxims of science or the refinements of philosophy; the knowledge, I mean, of men and manners.

Surrounded by a rough and barren territory, which denied to its inhabitants even the

necessaries of life, the people of Mecca, like the Ishmaelites, their forefathers, depended principally on commerce for support. Thus urged by the call of unavoidable necessity, and favoured by a situation peculiarly advantageous to such pursuits, they carried on a constant and extensive intercourse with Persia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. In these employments the impostor was early initiated; and during his travels into the neighbouring nations, besides the general improvement and cultivation of his mind, he collected those particular observations which afterwards induced him to form, and acquired that knowledge which enabled him to execute, his daring and ambitious designs.

Whilst yet engaged in the occupations of commerce, and discharging with zeal and fidelity the humble duties of servitude, his strong and active genius already rose above the meanness and obscurity of his station; and, from a well-grounded confidence in its own powers, inspired him with an opinion, that he was born to move in a higher and more illustrious sphere. But when a sudden and unexpected change of fortune had raised him from poverty and dependence to opulence and ease, this opinion returned with augmented force; and he now began to me-

dictate seriously on the means of realizing those ideas, which had hitherto proceeded rather from the warmth of imagination, than from the deliberate dictates of reason, or even the impulses of serious and habitual hope.

From this period to the time when he announced his mission as the prophet of the most High, history has recorded nothing concerning the actions and the pursuits of Mahomet. Fifteen years of his life are involved in the deepest and most impenetrable obscurity. One historian only informs us, that God had inspired his prophet with a love of solitude and retirement. But in this single information we see a ray of light sufficient to clear up the darkness of this mysterious interval. In a lonely cave, in the recesses of Mount Hara, he shunned the society of men.

Doubtless, it was in this silence of retirement that the artful impostor laid the foundation of his future greatness: here he drew the general outlines, and here he adjusted the several particulars of that great and hazardous project, which was hereafter to raise him to glory and dominion.

At the time when Mahomet travelled into the neighbouring nations, there were some peculiar circumstances in their government and manners, which were calculated to strike

the deepest impression on a vigorous and reflecting mind. The internal distractions of Persia on the one side, and the notorious weakness of the Roman provinces on the other, together with the universal corruption of manners that prevailed amongst the inhabitants of both, were indications too strong to be overlooked of the approaching ruin of these mighty and unwieldy empires.

But the state of religion was probably the grand and principal object that attracted the attention, and employed the reflections of Mahomet. A little consideration, and especially an acquaintance with the Jewish and Christian doctrines, must have convinced him of the absurdity of that impious idolatry in which he had been educated, and in all the madness of which his countrymen were still plunged almost universally.

In the mean time he beheld the Jews, despised and detested by all men, still obstinately refusing to mix with the rest of mankind, and adhering with unshaken attachment to the law of Moses : whilst the Christians, divided in their faith, and degenerate in their practice, had miserably perverted the spirit of their religion, and, forgetting the union and love which it prescribed, were denouncing anathemas on each other. Sensible

of the advantages which he should derive from this confused state of affairs, and eagerly ambitious of power, the impostor determined to cover his deep and aspiring schemes under the specious veil of divine revelation. Hence, with a boldness of design which was exceeded only by the cunning that conducted it, he meditated a religion, which, by flattering the corrupt passions and prejudices of each, might embrace in its ample and comprehensive law the Christian, the Idolater, and the Jew. The plan was great, and the execution was arduous: but the wily impostor facilitated its success by laying the foundation of his whole system on one plain and obvious principle, which had never been disputed by either; the belief of one only supreme God, the infinite creator of the universe, the just rewarder of virtue, and the dreadful avenger of guilt. A doctrine thus simple, which presented to reason no more than it could easily conceive, was apparently well calculated for the reception of all the nations upon earth. But in order to stamp the highest possible sanction upon the doctrines which he taught, and (what was of still greater consequence) to lay the firmest foundation on which he might build his own greatness and power, the impostor superad-

ded the obligation of believing in him as the inspired prophet and messenger of the Almighty.

Having fixed this basis, he next proceeded to erect upon it a motley and misshapen superstructure, composed of the most incoherent and heterogeneous materials. In order the more effectually to accomplish the great object which he had in view, of aggrandizing himself by cementing in one system the most discordant opinions of those whom he laboured to seduce, he deemed it necessary to accommodate his plan, as far as possible, to the preconceived notions of all.

With this view he artfully selected from the Jewish and Christian morality those parts which seemed best adapted to the sentiments and manners of the inhabitants of the warmer climates in particular ; blending them at the same time with the popular traditions, the superstitious ceremonies, and the ruling opinions of his idolatrous countrymen. To have laid claim to a revelation totally new, and independent of any which had preceded it, would have been too bold and hazardous a step : the profound policy of Mahomet therefore suggested to him a safer and more practicable plan. He alleged with much plausibility, that God had originally given one

grand and universal religion to all the sons of men ; that when the cares and avocations of life had obliterated, or the frailty or perverseness of human nature had corrupted this faith, it had pleased the Almighty in his mercy to send forth successive prophets, to instruct and to reform mankind, ever prone to wander from the plain and simple paths of truth : such, amongst many others whom his own creative imagination raised up and dignified with the prophetic office, such was Moses ; whose mission was by the particular designation of providence confined within the narrow limits of one people : such too was Jesus ; whose more liberal and comprehensive system, proceeding from a fuller and more perfect exertion of divine goodness, was destined to confer its benefits, without distinction, on all the widely extended race of mankind. Since time, however, had unhappily corrupted the doctrines of Christianity itself, and left men once more to wander in darkness and in error, it had at length pleased the Almighty to elect HIM as the instrument of his gracious designs ; to commission him to rescue religion from the corruptions which obscured its native splendour ; and to place him above Jesus himself, by making him the

last great restorer of truth and virtue to the world.

This scheme in itself appeared fair and plausible; and the circumstances of the times were such, as tended in a peculiar degree to countenance and support it. For we cannot but acknowledge, that the almost universal corruption of the opinions and the practice of Christians, the insuperable obstinacy of the Jews, and the impious idolatry of the Arabs, might, to the hasty and superficial observer, seem to render such an interposition of the Deity worthy his benevolence and his justice.

As the Arabians were the more immediate objects of Mahomet's imposture, he deemed it expedient to flatter them in particular with this notion of an early faith once committed to their ancestors; he bade them recollect the sacred names of Abraham and of Ishmael, the venerable founders of their nation; and taught them to regard the doctrines which he proposed to their belief, as nothing more than a restoration of that pure and holy religion which those favourite patriarchs had professed.

Having thus far matured his great and ambitious project; having thus determined

on the most probable means of executing it with success, he thought that he might now venture to announce his pretended revelation to the world.

The character of Mahomet, according to Eastern historians, had been hitherto preserved unblemished: his moral qualities, no less than his other accomplishments, had contributed to raise him in the esteem of his fellow-citizens; and his integrity in particular had been honoured with the most flattering and distinguished testimony of their approbation. That he might not, however, by too rapid a transition become a reformer of those very errors in which he himself had been involved; that he might not too suddenly commence a preacher against that idolatry which he had practised in common with the rest of his countrymen; and that he might acquire a reputation for sanctity in some measure correspondent with the high and venerable office which he was about to assume; he affected to pass a great part of his time in religious retirement, and holy meditation; he became more grave in his deportment, more profuse in his charities, and more assiduous in his devotions.

When the time which he had chosen to announce his mission approached; when the

night which was to cover him with glory, according to the expression of Abulfeda, was at length arrived; he withdrew in silence to the solitary cave, which had been the usual place of his retirement. Here, he pretended, the divine commands were first communicated to him with the most awful solemnity; and here he received his great commission as the prophet and apostle of God, by the hands of Gabriel, the glorious messenger of the most High.

The first efforts of the impostor were confined to the conversion of his own household. Having succeeded thus far, he pretended to receive more frequent communications of the divine will; and proceeded by every species of artifice, and by the force of superior talents, to gain over to his party some of the most powerful inhabitants of Mecca.

After three years thus spent in secret amidst various machinations and intrigues, when he could now repose full confidence in the blind obedience of his new converts, he at length feigned an express command from heaven to proclaim to the world at large the important office with which he was invested, and to exhort his countrymen in particular to forsake the error of their ways, to embrace with ardour the holy religion which he

was commissioned to reveal to them; and thus to save themselves from that vengeance, which an offended God would most assuredly execute upon a disobedient world.

He now began to declaim boldly and openly against the reigning idolatry; and, that his preaching might produce the greatest possible effect, he omitted no opportunity of awakening the passions of his hearers: he roused their hopes by his glowing and animated descriptions of the eternal pleasures that adorn the habitation of the faithful: he alarmed their fears by the horrid pictures which he drew of the dreadful torments that were destined to be the portion of unbelievers.

The Christians, indeed, unmasked the designs and exposed the fallacies of the impostor. The Jews, not perceiving in Mahomet any of those characteristic marks which were to distinguish the glorious Messiah whom they still expected, rejected his pretensions with disdain. The rulers of Mecca, sensible of the danger which threatened a worship, on which all their credit and authority were founded, endeavoured to impede his progress, first by severe and repeated menaces, and at length by actual violence. Even the multitude, on his first public appearance in

the character of prophet, ridiculed his pretences, and insulted him with the odious appellations of a magician and an impostor.

Under circumstances thus discouraging, amidst the clamours of the unthinking, the suspicions of the unprejudiced, and the abhorrence even of the virtuous, the bold and determined impostor remained unmoved. Unshaken in his purposes, and regardless of the dangers and difficulties that surrounded him, opposition, instead of damping his courage, or repressing his ambition, served only to confirm his resolution, and to increase his activity. Apparently insensible to every insult that was offered, he applied himself with unwearied assiduity to all ranks and distinctions of men. By the charms of his conversation, and by the elegance of his manners, he obtained the favour of the great: he sought to gain the affections of the poor, by condescending to mix with them in all the habits of familiar intercourse, and by relieving their distresses with a liberal and unsparing hand: by unremitted endeavours to please, and by a constant exertion of those arts of insinuation which he so eminently possessed, he gradually conciliated the affections of all.

Thus, in defiance of all opposition, the exalted genius, the manly and persuasive elo-

quence, the consummate policy, and the alluring doctrines of the new prophet, daily augmented the number of his disciples.

Compelled, however, at length to escape, by a precipitate flight, the last desperate effort of his exasperated foes, he found a secure and advantageous retreat in a place^a whither his reputation had already reached. Here, by an exertion of the same diligence, and by the practice of the same artifice, he soon found himself enabled to collect a considerable number of followers, whose belief in his mission was firmly established, and whose zeal for the propagation of his religion, and the support of his character as a prophet, was too strong to be shaken by any threats of danger or of death.

With increasing power the impatience and the ambition of the impostor also increased. The view of empire seems now to have opened more fully and clearly upon him; and, unable to wait for the tedious operation and uncertain effect of argument and of reason, he now pretended to have received the divine command to unsheath the sword of the Almighty, and to subdue by the violence of arms those who had been obstinately deaf to the voice of persuasion.

^a Medina.

Mahomet had hitherto acted the darker and more disguised part of the crafty deceiver, and the profound politician ; but without neglecting these arts, he now began to assume also another character, and to display the more splendid talents of a commander and a hero. The first actions, however, with which he commenced his military career, resemble the irregular exploits of the robber, more than the systematical operations of the warrior ; and seem to have been influenced rather by a rapacious desire of plunder, than by a pious zeal for the conversion of unbelievers. But, enriched by the spoils, and aggrandized by the fame of his successes, he was soon enabled to engage in attempts of greater and more extensive importance.

The rapidity of his attacks, the sagacity of his stratagems, and the boldness of his designs, aided by the enthusiastic valour with which he had inspired his troops, soon rendered him superior to his numerous adversaries. Whilst the flame of fanaticism, which he himself had kindled, burnt furiously in every breast around him, he alone cool and deliberate in the midst of slaughter and confusion, marked every movement of the enemy, took advantage of every error, and

left no artifice unemployed to obtain and to secure the victory. The conduct of Mahomet towards those whom his arms had conquered was different under different circumstances: according as interest required, or policy directed, we behold it now distinguished by an ostentation of the most heroic clemency, and now stained with all the excesses of ferocious cruelty. When mild and gentle measures seemed best calculated to conciliate the affections of those whom despair might render formidable, we behold him with an air of affected generosity dismissing thousands of his captives. When acts of severity appeared expedient to intimidate the obstinate, we behold him basely taking vengeance on the fallen, and, with every circumstance of deliberate and savage barbarity, imbruing his hands in the blood of the conquered.

His numerous and splendid victories were not only the efficacious means of extending his power, and of realizing the hopes which ambition had inspired; but they were also eventually subservient to the gratification of a passion less generous indeed, though not less violent in its effects, or less forcible in its influence on the human heart. Whilst the wretched victims of his power were sa-

crificed to his cruelty or his policy, a still severer fate awaited the female captive; who was compelled to submit to the base and inordinate desires of a barbarian conqueror, and was forced into those arms which were stained with the recent slaughter of a friend, a brother, or a parent.

From every view of the life of Mahomet, and even from the partial representations of his zealous and infatuated followers, it is evident that ambition and lust were the passions which divided the empire of his breast. From the separate or united influence of these powerful principles, it would not be difficult to trace almost every great design, and every important action of his life. Hence originated the grand and stupendous scheme of his imposture; and hence we observe each subordinate part throughout its whole contexture, pointing immediately or ultimately to the gratification of one or both of these predominant passions.

During his earlier years, indeed, every measure seems to have been dictated, and every inferior consideration utterly absorbed, by an unvaried attention to the pursuits and the interests of ambition. The nature of his undertaking, particularly in its first stages, required no common degree of prudence

and caution. That policy, which formed so distinguishing a part of his character, doubtless compelled him for a while to conceal, if not to restrain, the indulgence of irregular passions : lest the licentiousness of his manners should give offence to those whose good opinion it was his object to conciliate ; and the immorality of his practice, by betraying the secret motives and propensities of his heart, should unravel the web which his hypocrisy was weaving, before it had acquired sufficient strength and consistence. Hence, both before, and during the first years of his pretended mission, whilst his daring schemes were yet immature, and their success uncertain, the artful impostor, as we have reason to believe, regulated every part of his conduct by the strict rules of external decorum. But no sooner was his reputation as a prophet established ; no sooner was his authority rooted too firmly to be shaken by any common or ordinary event, and his ambition in some measure satiated by the possession of power, than another passion arose ; and, shaking off the restraint which had hitherto suppressed it, with a violence equally arbitrary, now hurried him away into the wildest extravagancies.

At length his attention to the cold and

jealous cautions of prudence ceased with its necessity ; and from an affectation of exemplary purity of manners, he now rushed into the most public and criminal excesses of sensual indulgence. That address to the carnal appetites, which permitted them so liberal an indulgence in the present life, and promised their complete and eternal gratification in another, was one of the most alluring snares which he so successfully spread to captivate his countrymen. The laws which he prescribed for the regulation of these passions were too loose for the most compliant moralist to justify, and too favourable to afford the most abandoned sensualist any probable ground of complaint.

But the boundless lust of Mahomet disdained to be confined even within the extensive limits which he had drawn for his followers. It was reasonable that the prophet should be distinguished above the rest of mankind by exclusive privileges ; and that his appetites and passions should be indulged with an appropriate and peculiar licence. Sole master of the oracles of heaven, he ever compelled them to speak that language, which was best adapted to his designs. Hence he was possessed of an unfailing re-

source under every exigency, and thus a satisfactory answer was always prepared to solve every objection, and to remove every scruple, which the malice of his enemies, or the pious doubts of his friends, might raise against him. Hence we behold the God of purity himself introduced to sanctify and approve the sensual immoralities of his prophet, and to silence the murmurs of his profane or short-sighted followers; who had been weak enough to imagine, that the same laws, which were obligatory on the vulgar, likewise extended their sanction to the sacred and venerable character of the apostle.

I will not presume to shock the feelings of this audience by a nearer prospect of the chamber of the prophet: indeed the most abandoned libertine would blush at the particular representation of the horrid and disgusting scenes which there unfold themselves to our astonished view. It is therefore sufficient to observe in general, that the retirements of Mahomet, from his first acquisition of power to his last decline of life, were continually disgraced by every excessive indulgence of that passion, which has a more particular tendency to degrade the dignity of the human character even below the brute creation.

That God *heareth not sinners*, is a dictate of common nature: and doubtless to a people who enjoyed a higher degree of civilization, or whose ideas of morality were purer and more refined than those of the Arabians at that period, these striking blemishes in the character of their prophet would have been sufficient at least to have excited the strongest suspicions against his sincerity, if not absolutely to have overthrown his pretensions to a divine communication.

But if the decision of the Arabs had been in any degree influenced by uncorrupt reason, they would have discovered objections equally unanswerable in other prominent and distinguishing features of their great legislator.

There is no stronger or more infallible criterion of truth and falsehood, than consistency. To support an assumed character with perfect uniformity, and to preserve a regular consistency of conduct under every circumstance, and in every situation of an active and varied life, is a task perhaps too hard for the sagacity of the most skilful impostor to accomplish. There are moments, in which the propensities of nature will shew themselves, and with irresistible violence break through every artificial restraint which

policy may impose. Besides, he who conducts a plan of imposture, and consequently whose success depends solely on the machinations of human prudence, is under a necessity of accommodating every design to external circumstances; so that his conduct will of course be ever found to vary with his situation.

Hence the fierce passions of Mahomet, which even in the earlier periods of life, when their influence is most powerful, had been compelled to bend to the views of ambition and the dictates of policy, no sooner felt the immediate danger of indulgence removed, than they impetuously transgressed every restraint of decorum, and even boldly bade defiance to the laws of justice and the obligations of morality,

Hence, as interest required, he now flattered the pride of the Jews, and now appealed to the prejudices of the Arabs: now selecting the temple of Jerusalem, and now that of Mecca, as the hallowed spot towards which the worship and the prayers of his followers should be directed. Hence too, at the commencement of his imposture, we find him humble and yielding, labouring only by the powers of eloquence, and by the softer arts of insinuation, to captivate the affections

of his countrymen : but in its more advanced state, we behold on a sudden the preacher, by divine command transformed into the warrior: we see his steps every where marked with blood and desolation ; and we hear him, with the stern and ferocious aspect of a conqueror, proposing death or conversion as the only alternative to his subject foes. Thus, in order the more effectually to accomplish his own base and interested designs, the bold impostor scrupled not to subject even the eternal and immutable counsels of the Almighty to the imputation of weakness and inconstancy.

But of the various disguises under which Mahomet attempted to veil the mysterious plan of his imposture, none was more artful in its design, or more successful in its event, than that profound ignorance, and total want of every kind of literature, to which he constantly pretended. On this was founded his most popular and prevailing argument for the truth of that revelation which he professed to communicate to the world. The elegant style of that revelation, the harmony of its sentences, and the sublimity of its conceptions, were universally acknowledged. Was it not then absurd to imagine, (as the impostor speciously argued,) that a work of

such extraordinary beauty and excellence could ever have been composed by a man who was destitute of every species of acquired knowledge, and who by his ignorance even of the common rudiments of early education had been precluded from the perusal of books and the use of writing?

To an Arab the argument was irresistible; and even Christian writers, in order to evade its force, have attempted to point out particularly the associates of the impostor, whom they imagine to have composed that Koran, which he only delivered to the world. That the ignorance of Mahomet was not real, but assumed, (considering the commerce in which he had been engaged, and the intercourse which he had held with the inhabitants of more polished states,) might have been reasonably suspected. But it might also have been inferred from proofs of a more direct and positive nature. Notwithstanding all his care and circumspection, the mask sometimes dropped off, and discovered at once his real character, and the falsehood of his pretences.

By the confession of his own historians, there were moments in which his pretended ignorance was forgotten, and he not only expressed a desire to exercise, but actually

practised that very art, of which he solemnly and repeatedly professed himself to be totally ignorant.

Thus difficult is it, and I might even say impossible, for the most finished and sagacious hypocrite to preserve an assumed character with perfect and unvaried uniformity. For nothing is permanent but truth, and nothing consistent but sincerity.

If the boundless ambition of Mahomet had been satisfied with that preeminence to which it might have aspired without a crime; if he had been content to have assumed only the character of a legislator, and, by the splendid and astonishing talents he possessed, to have civilized his barbarous countrymen, and reclaimed them from idolatry, without the aid of imposture and the impious pretence of divine revelation; if thus glorious had been the object he pursued, and thus innocent the means by which he attained it; his vices, enormous as they were, might have been overlooked or forgotten amidst the splendor of his virtues; and we might justly have ranked him amongst the most distinguished friends and benefactors of mankind.

But in the prophet of God, the great reformer of the world, it is natural to expect a

more exemplary purity of manners, and a stricter adherence to the laws of morality: every claim to an office thus sacred and venerable excites the severest attention, and justifies the most rigid examination: but from such a test the character of Mahomet shrinks with guilty apprehension; and however we may at first view admire the specious virtues and splendid abilities that adorned it, yet this admiration is quickly lost in abhorrence of the base and impious purposes to which they became subservient.

That the impostor, by the opinions which he introduced, really improved the manners of the Arabs, cannot perhaps be denied: the religion which he established, amidst all its errors and absurdities, possesses many principles in common with the true, and is doubtless in every respect far preferable to that absurd and monstrous idolatry which was then the prevailing creed of Arabia. But when we consider its more extensive diffusion and ultimate consequences; when we reflect on the excellence of that perfect and lovely system of doctrine and morals which it threatened to destroy, and whose benign influence it still continues fatally to obstruct; when we call to mind the immense multitudes of our fellow-creatures,

who are yet involved by its delusions in the most profound darkness and error, our opinion concerning him and his imposture is at once determined, and we behold both in their native features of horrid and almost unmixed deformity.

SERMON V.

2 COR. iv. 10.

That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest.

HAVING before viewed the life and character of Mahomet, let us now turn our eyes to a brighter picture; where every grace that can recommend religion, and every virtue that can adorn humanity, are so blended as to excite our admiration, and engage our love. Independently, indeed, of all comparison, the character of Jesus Christ stands forward as the most striking and illustrious representation of *whatever things are true, or just, or of good report*; and claims our praise by its own intrinsic excellence.

In the life of our blessed Lord we discover nothing that can either create suspicion, or excite aversion; we see a thousand excellencies which the hardest enemies of the gospel are compelled involuntarily to approve. All that negative virtue can secure, and all that positive merit can attain, appear to have been united with equal lustre in this lovely and venerable pattern of Christian imitation.

But before I descend to the particulars which it may be necessary to bring forward in contrasting the life of Christ with that of Mahomet, I beg your permission to introduce some interesting, and, I hope, not impertinent reflections on the nature of that historical form in which the Christian revelation has been transmitted to us.

This form involves the correctness of system without its abstruseness, and the energy of eloquence without its ostentation. It happily unites the brightness of example with the precision and perspicuity of precept. To the minuteness of detail which belongs to biography, it adds much of that regular arrangement, and of that vivid colouring, by which the more eminent writers of poetry have endeavoured to mark the distinguishing and appropriate qualities of their favourite heroes. Instead of sometimes amusing, and sometimes astonishing us, with those brilliant, but indistinct and fleeting impressions which are excited by general descriptions, or elaborate panegyric, it leads us through a series of uniform and characteristic actions, into a clear and full knowledge of the agent. It enables, and gently impels the mind to combine by its own operation all the detached instances of virtue into one bright assemblage.

It transports the imagination, as it were, into the presence of the person whose excellencies are recorded, and gives all the finer sensibilities of the soul an immediate and warm interest in every word and every action. Hence, the manner in which the sacred writers have described the actions of Christ, not only increases the efficacy of his instructions, but constitutes a new, a striking, and peculiar species of evidence for the truth of his religion.

This position it may be of use for us to illustrate yet further.

To compare the character of Socrates with that of Christ is foreign to our present purpose: but of the manner in which their lives have been respectively written, we may properly take some notice. On the history of Socrates then, have been employed the exquisite taste of Xenophon, and the sublime genius of Plato. The virtues of this extraordinary man are selected by them as the noblest subjects for the fullest display and most active exertion of their talents; and they have brought to the task not merely the sagacity of philosophers, but the affection of friends, and the zeal of enthusiasts.

Now the different style of their writings, and the different tempers as well as capaci-

ties of the writers themselves, have produced some variety both in the scenes in which they have exhibited their master, and in the opinions which they have ascribed to him. But in the composition of each, Socrates is distinguished by a noble contempt of popular prejudice, and perverted science ; by an ardent admiration and steady pursuit of virtue ; by an anxious concern for the moral improvement of his hearers ; and by an heroic superiority to the pleasures of life, and to the terrors of impending death. What his illustrious biographers have performed in such a manner as to engage the attention and excite the admiration of successive ages, has been accomplished with yet greater success by the sacred writers. They have attained the same end under heavier difficulties, and by the aid of means, which, if they are considered as merely human, must surely be deemed inadequate to the task which they undertook. They were by no means distinguished by literary attainments, or by intellectual powers. Their education could not bestow on them very exalted or correct ideas of morality ; and their writings were destitute of every recommendation from the artificial ornaments of style. Yet have these four unlearned men effected by their artless simpli-

city a work, to which the talents of the two greatest writers of antiquity were not more than equal.

They have exhibited a character far more lovely in itself, and far more venerable, than fiction has ever painted; and in their mode of exhibiting it, they surpass the fidelity, the distinctness, and precision, which two of the most celebrated writers have been able to preserve, when exerting the whole powers of their genius, and actuated by the fondest attachment, they were endeavouring to do justice to the noblest pattern of real virtue of which antiquity can boast. In Jesus have the Evangelists described brighter and more numerous virtues, than Socrates is said even by his professed admirers to have possessed. In their descriptions they have without effort, and under the influence, it must be allowed, of sincere conviction only, maintained a greater uniformity than the most prejudiced reader can discover in the beautiful compositions of Plato and Xenophon.

If the desire of communicating their own favourite opinions, or the mutual jealousy of literary fame, be assigned as a reason for the diversity of representation in the two Greek writers, we allow the probability of both suppositions: but we contend, that each of these

motives is inconsistent with that love of truth, which is necessary to establish the credibility of a biographer. We also contend, that the Evangelists were really possessed of this excellent quality ; that they never deviated from it, in order to indulge their enmity or envy ; and that with apparent marks of difference in their language, their dispositions, and perhaps in their abilities, they have yet exhibited the character of Christ the most striking, if their narratives be separately considered ; and the most consistent, if they be compared with each other. Be it observed too, that the difficulty of preserving that consistence increases both with the peculiarity and magnitude of the excellencies described, and with the number of the persons who undertake the office of describing them.

If it be said, that the superior pretensions of Christ, as a divine teacher, required more splendid virtues than what are expected from Socrates, who taught morality upon principles of human reason only ; whence is it that the unpolished, uncultivated minds of the Evangelists should even conceive a more magnificent character than the imaginations of a Plato, or a Xenophon ? What aids did they apparently possess for representing it more advantageously ? That those four unlettered

men should have drawn such a character, with more uniformity in the whole, and with more sublimity in the parts, is therefore a fact which can be accounted for only, by admitting the constant and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, the real existence of Christ's perfections, and the strong and lasting impression they made upon those who conversed with him. Those perfections themselves were, indeed, extraordinary both in kind and in degree. In their kind they are admirable patterns for the conduct of Christ's followers: and in their degree, they are eminently and indisputably proportioned to the transcendent and unrivalled dignity of his own mission.

Every reader of discernment is disgusted at the fictitious representation of "those faultless monsters which the world ne'er saw:" every writer of taste finds it necessary to procure credit to his representations, by throwing some shades of error and infirmity over the wisest and best of men: every impartial and profound enquirer into the constitution of the human mind is aware that the ruling passion, by which the most amiable and venerable of men are distinguished, sometimes degenerates into excess; that the indiscriminate and eager pursuit of

virtue itself imperceptibly leads into vice ; that the most illustrious characters are distinguished by some predominant excellence ; that he who surpasses his fellow-creatures in some instances, falls below them in others ; and that, among the sons of men, no one has yet existed, in whom every great and good quality, every religious and social perfection, have been at once united.

To these incontrovertible and general rules, the life of Christ affords one glorious exception. There is a variety in his virtues, which never shocks probability ; and at the same time there is an uniformity, which never creates satiety. Upon the most common actions he bestows a novelty in his manner of performing them : the uncommon he recommends by a simplicity, which adds to their charms, without degrading their dignity.

Here, indeed, it becomes me to observe, that in all his actions he, without any appearance of design, preserves that decorum which the ancient philosophers have explained with so much ingenuity, and which is utterly beyond the reach of affectation or imposture. In abstaining from licentious pleasures he was equally free from ostentatious singularity, and churlish sullenness. In partaking, as he sometimes did, the innocent

enjoyments of life, he never fell into the gaiety of the Epicurean; in relinquishing them, when the great ends of his mission required it, he was equally free from the assumed and unnatural insensibility of the Stoic. When he complied with the established ceremonies of his countrymen, that compliance was not accompanied by any marks of bigotry or superstition: when he opposed their rooted prepossessions, his opposition was perfectly exempt from the captious petulance of a controversialist, and the undistinguishing zeal of an innovator.

It is well known, that some virtues owe much of their lustre to local and temporary circumstances; and that the same actions which may be highly, nay even justly, extolled in one age or country, are in others surveyed with listless indifference. “In antiquity,” says an acute observer^a, “the heroes of philosophy, as well as those of war and patriotism, have a grandeur and force of sentiment which astonishes our narrow souls, and is rashly considered as extravagant and supernatural. They, in their turn, I allow, would have equal reason to consider as romantic and incredible the degree of humanity, clemency, order, tran-

^a Hume's Essays.

“quillity, and other social virtues, to which
“in the administration of government we
“have attained in modern times, had any
“one been then alive to have made a fair re-
“presentation of them.”

The life of Christ blends these opposite and seemingly irreconcilable excellencies. It avoids their extravagance, and supplies their defects. The courage of our Lord was active in encountering the dangers to which he was exposed, and passive under the aggravated calamities which the malice of his foes heaped upon him. Yet his fortitude was remote from every appearance of rashness; and his patience was equally exempt from abject pusillanimity and stupid apathy. He was firm without obstinacy, and humble without meanness. In the general tenor of his life he was mild and gentle; the promoter of peace amongst other men, and the strictest observer of it in his own behaviour. But when great and real occasions called for different deportment, he displayed a nobleness of mind, a contempt of danger and death, such as the importance of his mission required from him, and such as the consciousness of rectitude could alone inspire.

To the virtues of Christ, whether we consider them as too sublime to excite any sen-

timents of presumptuous emulation, or too rational not to justify our endeavours to imitate them ; whether we examine his private or his public conduct ; may in a nobler sense be applied the beautiful and animated language, in which a celebrated orator of antiquity has extolled those arts, by which he was himself distinguished. “ *Adolescentiam*
“ *alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res*
“ *ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium*
“ *præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt*
“ *foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur,*
“ *rusticantur.*”

Those virtues, indeed, will in no age and no country lose either their usefulness, their beauty, or their merit. They are in various degrees practicable ; under every form of government, whether free or despotic, whether barbarous or refined ; and in every state of knowledge, whether it be imperfect or improved. In the lowest condition of the world, they tend to lessen the miseries and disorders to which the unsearchable providence of God has subjected our species : they will increase the stock of our happiness, and exalt our nature to the highest perfection, when accompanied by every assistance which reason, which philosophy and civiliza-

tion, can bestow in forming the moral or the religious character of man.

These observations will, I trust, both elucidate and justify the biographical form in which Revelation is conveyed to us. God, it is true, might have made known to us his will, by a series of laws, by abstract reasonings, by short instructive sentences, by copious and regular systems, or by any of the various modes of human composition. But Christianity aims at a nobler end, and pursues it by the most proper and efficacious methods. We read, indeed, the opinions and the belief of Socrates, and the commands and promises of Mahomet. But by Jesus Christ, virtue, of every kind and in every degree, is exemplified as well as taught. He is the pattern as well as the teacher of the duties we are to perform. His precepts shew us what we ought to practise; his conduct convinces us that it is practicable; and the rewards which he has offered are powerful incentives to us to practise it from the best motives, and in the best manner. His resurrection from the grave confirms our faith; his ascension to glory animates our hopes; the actions of his life, and the circumstances of his death, enlarge and invigorate our cha-

city. By these means all the parts of Christianity form one great and consistent whole: every moral rule is realized, and becomes a proof of religious truth; whilst every religious truth, in its turn, illustrates and enforces every moral rule. The actions of God himself are, indeed, invisible; those of men are imperfect; but the actions of Christ (considered in his human character) are both visible and perfect: they are level to our apprehensions, and most worthy of our imitation.

Religion is thus made intelligible to all, because all are bound to obey it. It is accompanied by a species of demonstration, which the meanest cannot misunderstand; it is recommended by such an instance of its beauty and its usefulness, as is calculated to remove every scruple, and to silence every objection.

To evince the justness of these general observations, I shall now enter more particularly upon that comparison between the character of Christ and that of Mahomet, to which I am led by the subject of these Lectures.

The situation and manners of the Jews at the time when our Lord entered upon his public ministry, and the opposition to the

gospel, to which they gave birth, have already been the subject of our consideration. We have seen, that of the many false and mistaken notions which then prevailed among that blind and deluded people, the expectation of a temporal Messiah was the most extensive and most important. Impatient under the galling yoke of servitude, and blindly attached to an opinion, which was at once supported by national pride, and in appearance founded on the literal and express authority of divine revelation; the people in general, and the vulgar in particular, were eager to admit, and zealous to defend, the claims of every pretender to this splendid character. The peculiar nature and wide-spread influence of this prejudice offered the most favourable opportunity, and presented the fairest prospect of temporal authority and dominion, which could have been desired by the most sanguine and ambitious impostor. But of this opportunity no advantage was taken by Jesus Christ. The plan which he pursued was in every respect the reverse of what an interested deceiver would have concerted, whose hopes of success were founded only in the machinations of human policy.

His first public appearance was in the highest degree unpopular, and opposed to

all the prejudices and all the pride of his countrymen. Instead of alluring them by the prospect of temporal dominion, to which their hopes and expectations universally pointed, he proclaimed the commencement of a spiritual and invisible kingdom, little calculated to attract the attention of a people, who had never been accustomed to raise their views beyond the objects of sense ; and totally inconsistent with every opinion which had been transmitted to them by tradition, and sanctified among them by authority. Instead of erecting his victorious standard as the glorious redeemer of Israel, their mighty deliverer from the disgraceful bondage of Roman oppression, and from the power of every earthly foe ; he offered them a redemption, more beneficial indeed, though less attractive to the sensual mind ; a redemption from the dreadful tyranny of death. He invited them to a deliverance greater in itself, though less consonant to their wishes, than exemption from servitude to the Roman power ; a deliverance from the yet severer and more ignominious slavery of sin.

Had interest, or ambition, been the guide of his actions, he would certainly have assumed that character, to which the warmest hopes and the most rooted prepossessions of

the Jews universally inclined. He would not have opposed alike the pride of princes, and the superstition of the people; he would have either courted popularity, or grasped at dominion; he, at least, would not have taken every measure, that had a natural tendency to alarm the jealousy of the magistrate, and to provoke the displeasure of the multitude.

As ambition had no share in his claims, as his kingdom was neither formed on the policy, nor supported by the power of the world, he sought not its favour, nor shrunk from its displeasure. Instead of labouring to increase the number of his followers, by an insinuating flexibility in his own manners, or by a corrupt compliance with their prejudices, he gave offence by the unaffected plainness of the one, and by an undisguised opposition to the other. He disdained to conciliate the affections of any class of men, however dignified by their station, or formidable for their power, by any base or dishonourable concessions: he did not endeavour to win even their assent by a servile or a treacherous accommodation of his doctrines to their follies, or their vices. At the same time he opposed those vices, not with the indiscriminate rage of a blind enthusiast, but with the steady resolu-

tion of a wise and upright mind, that mixed zeal with knowledge, and added conviction to authority. Even by the confession of his enemies, ^b *he was true, and taught the way of God in truth, neither cared he for any man : for he regarded not the persons of men.*

A conduct like this was utterly inconsistent with the intricate wiles of policy, or the aspiring views of ambition. Far from engaging in the pursuit of secular power and authority, the blessed Jesus repeatedly and peremptorily rejected them when offered to his hands. He disclaimed the office of a ruler or a judge ; he even fled from the infatuated multitude, who acknowledged him for their king, and would have exalted him to a throne.

The impostor of Arabia seized the sceptre, before it was offered to him ; the dictator of Rome rejected a crown, which it was both unsafe and dishonourable for him to wear ; and was conscious, that he had already obtained the solid power of monarchy, while he reluctantly, though ostentatiously, refused its gaudy appendages. But far different was the conduct of Jesus Christ. He declined as well the reality of dominion which Cæsar possessed, as the appearance of it which Mahomet assumed. He declined them, at a

^b Matt. xxii. 16.

time when by accepting them he might have gratified the pride of his countrymen, subdued all the prejudices which obstructed the belief of his mission, and averted many of the dangers which threatened his life.

Those mistaken views of temporal grandeur, which the disciples had indulged, their Master industriously corrected ; he sought on every occasion to humble their pride, to draw off their attention from the things of this world, and to fix them on those above.

Men, who set no value on any interests but those which were connected with honour, wealth, and pleasure, contemned the humility of his appearance, and derided the plainness of his preaching. Their pride disdained all association with a person ignobly born, who pursued no measures to exalt himself above the common rank of life. Hence, with an immediate view to that humble appearance which he condescended to assume on earth, the prophet Isaiah thus beautifully delineates his character. *‘ He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground : he hath no form, nor comeliness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted*

‘ Isaiah liii. 2, 3.

with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Even his numerous and stupendous miracles were not wrought through ostentation, or with any view to serve the purposes of human glory. On the contrary, they were acts of the purest and most disinterested benevolence. They have a kind of ethical excellence, a close and striking conformity to the peculiar temper, as well as the distinguishing and important mission of him, by whom they were performed.

He often enjoined the strictest secrecy to those who were spectators of these mighty works; lest he should appear to affect more than to deserve the high character he sustained. ^d*Go thy way, tell no man,* was his frequent command to those whom he had rescued from the sharp anguish of disease, the gloomy horrors of blindness, or the agonizing distractions of demoniac phrenzy.

From a similar principle arose his condescension in admitting little children to his arms, in blessing them, and recommending them to the protection of his heavenly Father, and to the tender affection of his disciples. From the same principle, he vouch-

^d Matt. viii. 4. Mark viii. 26. Luke viii. 56.

safed to wash his disciples' feet ; and by so amiable an instance of humility inculcated this gracious lesson, that no office of benevolent assistance should be thought contemptible, or unworthy even the dignity of the most exalted character, if thereby a friend may be relieved in pain, or a fellow-creature extricated from distress.

Now if his humility had been only affected, in order to cover designs of which ambition was the hidden motive, there would have been some unguarded moment when the mask would have dropped off. But the whole life of our blessed Lord, in all its vicissitudes, is marked by the same calm indifference to worldly honours, the same manly disregard of popular applause, the same exemption from the impatience of desire when preeminence was offered to him, and from the anguish of disappointment when it was refused.

As the conduct of Christ was not actuated by ambition, so neither was it influenced by any other base and inordinate passion. He did not make his doctrine subservient to the gratification of any darling lusts and corrupt affections in himself, or his disciples : on the contrary, he constantly enjoined the practice of the purest, the strictest, and the most re-

finer chastity; not only in outward actions, but even in the inward imaginations of the heart. He boasted of no exclusive privileges, nor claimed any invidious exceptions from the laws which he had prescribed to others. He allowed no licentiousness under the pretence of religion; and transgressed no rules of decency or of rectitude, under the arrogated sanction of the Divinity.

Though possessed of the most unbounded power, we behold him living continually in a state of voluntary humiliation and poverty; we see him daily exposed to almost every species of want and distress; afflicted without a comforter, persecuted without a protector, and wandering about, according to his own pathetic complaint, because he *had not where to lay his head.*

Though regardless of the pleasures, and sometimes destitute of the comforts, of life, he never provokes our disgust, by the sourness of the misanthrope; or our contempt, by the inactivity of the recluse. He never affected gloomy austerity; nor sought to be sequestered from the world, in order to preserve the spirituality of his mind. But his ministry was professedly, and really, destined to active employment; and engaged in promoting the noblest interests of mankind.

He therefore freely mixed with them in all the habits of social intercourse: and in those moments, when all the avenues of the heart are open to gaiety and affection, he silently instructed his companions in the rare, but exquisite art of being cheerful without levity, and of uniting solid improvement with harmless entertainment. Socrates conversed familiarly with the impious and the licentious, for the sake of correcting more effectually their errors, and restraining their vices; but his reasonings are sometimes unnecessarily abstruse, sometimes paradoxical, and very often indecisive: and in his behaviour instances may be found where his gaiety degenerates into buffoonery, and his irony into bitter and indecent sarcasm. Jesus deigned to associate with publicans and sinners: but he always preserved an exact decorum in word and deed; and even in his most familiar conversations he steadily kept in view the momentous end for which he came into the world.

His attention to their welfare was evidenced not only by his salutary injunctions, which breathed the full and genuine spirit of compassion and love; but by his readiness to embrace every opportunity of relieving their distresses, and administering to their

wants. He was, therefore, in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense, *eyes to the blind; feet to the lame; and the blessings of them that were ready to perish came upon him.* In every period and circumstance of his life we thus behold dignity and elevation blended with love and pity: something, which, though it awakens our admiration, yet attracts our confidence. We see power; but it is a power which is rather our security than our dread; a power softened by tenderness, and soothing, while it awes.

And yet, with all the gentleness of a meek and lowly mind, we behold an heroic firmness, which no terrors could shake, and no opposition could restrain. This union of opposite qualities constitutes, indeed, the distinguishing beauty of his character. It presents us, as it were, with the lights and shades, which, mixed in due proportion, contribute to the finishing of the picture. Had his actions been governed only by the soft and yielding influences of gentleness and compassion, he never could have completed a work, which called for the most determined efforts of active zeal and fortitude. Besides this deficiency in point of positive exertion, his conduct, if wholly guided by the gentler

^c Job xxix. 15, 13.

principles of the human heart, would have subjected him to the suspicion of a blind and irrational impulse: it would have been imputed to a complexional felicity of temper, a mere instinctive benevolence; which, having no moral motive, could be entitled to no praise; and which, being destitute of a steady principle, would prove of little benefit to mankind. The conduct of our blessed Lord was, therefore, guided by reason as well as by affection; and was distinguished as much by an heroic zeal for the truth, and an unrelenting opposition to the errors and wickedness of the times, as by the gentler qualities of meekness, compassion, and forbearance.

That the character sustained by our Lord was not assumed, that he was in reality and truth what he appeared to be, is evident from the perfect consistency of his conduct.

In the exemplary uniformity of Cato's behaviour, we see the cause of that splendid panegyric which the historian has bestowed on him: “^fEsse, quam videri, bonus malebat.” Now on this very principle we assert the sincerity of Christ; because, in every period of his history we find that he never swerves from moral rectitude, nor sinks below the dignity of his religious character. In

^f Sallust. Bell. Catil.

the private scenes of life, and in the public occupations of his ministry ; whether the object of admiration or of ridicule, of love or of persecution ; whether welcomed with hosannas, or insulted with anathemas ; we still see him pursuing with unwearied constancy the same end, and preserving the same integrity of life and manners.

To exemplify these extraordinary qualities and virtues in the actions of that life which they adorned, is a task from which I retire with awful diffidence.

Some of the brightest characters which poetry has feigned, or history has recorded, become more pleasing and more interesting to us from the contrast of their weaknesses and excellencies in different situations, or from the mixture of both in the same action. But the life of Christ has none of those inequalities, which it is the delight of the orator to paint, and of the philosopher to analyze. The natural and unaffected deportment which he invariably preserved, without painful exertion, and without insidious design ; the consistence between each particular action and each particular situation ; the conformity of all his actions to one common rule, the word of God ; and their tendency to one common end, the salvation of mankind ; may

be explored by the profound moralist, must be admired by the pious believer, but cannot be described, surely, without a portion of that matchless simplicity, with which they are recorded by the inspired evangelists. Too plain for ornament, and too grand for illustration, the character of Jesus leaves at a distance the powers of language. Surrounded with the meanest circumstances, and at the same time distinguished by the most important and astonishing events, it seems to baffle equally by its humility, and its majesty, all the feeble efforts of human eloquence.

The birth of our Saviour, placed in the lowliest scene of poverty, was first announced to the shepherds, watching their flocks: but the message was brought by an angel, and a multitude of the heavenly host. Though he was laid in a manger in despised Bethlehem, the Magi of the East were conducted by a star to visit the humble spot. Sprung, as he was, from the meanest origin, and educated in the meanest occupation; yet to him was committed the care of immortal souls, and the salvation of a corrupt and deluded world. His associates he had called from the poorest and most ignorant of the people: them, however, did he commission to publish the

doctrines of faith; and on them the Holy Ghost descended. Though a friendless wanderer, in his own country an exile and an outcast, he was distinguished whithersoever he went by signs and miracles. Even in his last hour, when he was numbered with malefactors on the cross; the darkness which overspread the land, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, and all the convulsions, as it were, of sympathizing nature, gave tokens of the Son of God.

Considered then in all its circumstances, the history of Christ shrinks not from comparison with the most partial and lofty representation of the prophet of Arabia.

Of both we find, that the earlier part of life, before the publication of their respective missions, passed away in silence, private and undistinguished. The first years of Mahomet were busied in the cares of merchandize; till returning to his native city, he devoted to solitude and retirement the leisure which his opulence had procured. The youth of Jesus was spent in domestic privacy, and was remarkable only for affectionate and dutiful submission to his parents; unless, indeed, when in the temple he by his ready answers to the questions of the Rabbins, and his skilful exposition of the scriptures,

astonished those that heard him, and gave an omen of his future greatness.

The designs of Mahomet were gradually and cautiously unfolded ; and in order to prepare the minds of his countrymen for the reception of his faith, he first artfully persuaded his own relations and domestics, and drew to his side the most powerful of his neighbours.

Jesus walked forth by the sea of Galilee, and saw fishers casting their nets. These were his first converts and disciples. Though they were destitute of riches and of power, he found in them what his ministry required, an honest and a willing spirit. He won them neither by subtle arguments, nor crafty persuasions ; but bade them forsake their nets and follow him, to see his humble dwelling, to hear his heavenly discourses to the people, and witness the wonders he was going to perform.

Jesus called his hearers to repentance, but Mahomet to conquest.

At their first appearance they were both compelled to avoid the rage of the multitude, who would have destroyed them : but Mahomet escaped by a secret, ignominious flight, and Jesus by a public miracle.

The revelation of the Arabian prophet was

inconsistent ; a system of contradiction, continually shifting with the views of his policy, and the necessities of his imposture ; now looking towards Mecca, and now to Jerusalem. Widely different was the conduct of Christ. He did not seek to accommodate his doctrine to fortuitous changes in his external circumstances ; he did not at one time revoke what he had asserted, or contradict what he had enjoined, at another. Every part of his teaching was regular and consistent in the objects to which it was directed, and the language in which it was conveyed.

Mahomet allured his followers with the glories of a visible monarchy, and the splendor of temporal dominion. In him we behold the lord of war, and the destroyer of mankind, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands who fell by his desolating sword ; laying cities in flames ; carrying misery and bloodshed through the earth ; and pursued in his victorious career by the lamentations and curses of its inhabitants. In Jesus we see the adorable prince of peace, the friend and saviour of the world, riding meekly to the holy City, hailed with the acclamations and blessings of much people, whom he had rescued from sin and death, wiping the tears

from all eyes, and healing every sickness and every disease.

And here the comparison must cease. The events that followed in our Saviour's life are too august to be placed in competition with any mortal power, and can be comprehended only by minds habituated to the contemplation of heavenly objects. Let us consider the passion of our Lord, and the magnificent scenes of his resurrection and ascension; and then ask, in what part of all the history of Mahometism any parallel or resemblance can be found? Let us consider the last days of Christ's continuance upon earth, and how does the prophet of Mecca sink in the comparison! Let us in imagination hear and see the blessed Jesus, when he gives his Apostles authority to go forth and baptize all nations, and preach in his name repentance and remission of sins; when he empowers them to cast out evil spirits, to speak with new tongues, and to work wonders; when he holds up to them the promise of the Comforter, and power from on high; and when, having blessed them, he ascends into heaven, where he is for ever seated in glory on the right hand of God.

But chiefly, what raises Christ and his religion far above all the fictions of Mahomet,

is that awful alternative of hopes and fears, that looking for of judgment, which our Christian faith sets before us.

At that day, when time, the great arbiter of truth and falsehood, shall bring to pass the accomplishment of the ages, and the Son of God shall make his enemies his footstool; then shall the deluded followers of the great impostor, disappointed of the expected intercession of their prophet, stand trembling and dismayed at the approach of the glorified Messiah.

Then shall they say, Yonder cometh in the clouds that Jesus, whose religion we laboured to destroy, whose temples we profaned, whose servants and followers we cruelly oppressed! Behold he cometh: but no longer the humble son of Mary, no longer a mere mortal prophet, the equal of Abraham and of Moses, as that deceiver taught us; but the everlasting Son of the everlasting Father! The Judge of mankind! The Sovereign of Angels! The Lord of all things both in earth and heaven!

is that awful alternative of hope and fear,
 that looking for judgment, which our Christ
 has both established and delayed.
 At that day, when time the great arbiter
 of truth and falsehood shall bring to pass
 the accomplishment of the ages, and the Son
 of God shall make his triumphal festival;
 then shall the wretched followers of the great
 impostor, disappointed of the expected in-
 heritance of their prophet, stand trembling
 and dismayed at the approach of the glo-
 rious Messiah.
 Then shall they say, I never counted on
 the clouds that I should have been
 bound to destroy, whose temples we pro-
 fessed to adore, and followers we cre-
 dited ourselves. Behold his coming: but no
 longer the humble son of Mary, no longer a
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SERMON VI.

I KINGS xiii. 18.

*He said—I am a prophet also—and an angel spake to me
by the word of the Lord. But he lied—*

IN the days of man's innocence, while he was yet but little lower than the angels, he conversed with God, without shame or terror, face to face. But when, by his fatal transgression, he had fallen from that happiness in which he was created, he was excluded from this exalted intercourse; and the Deity appointed beings of an intermediate rank between himself and mankind, to dispense his favours and to reveal his will to his degraded creature. After the transgression of Adam, he no longer conversed familiarly with the sons of men. Moses only was permitted to approach his presence, to converse immediately with the most High, and to behold from the cleft of the rock a small portion of the divine glory passing by.

Various were the methods by which the Almighty condescended to make known his will to his people. Usually indeed he spake

in dreams and visions : but the more solemn manner, in which he chose to instruct mankind, was by employing the ministration of angels ; who were occasionally sent to deliver the divine commands, and to disclose the hidden events of futurity to the patriarchs and prophets.

Of these divine messengers Gabriel alone is expressly named in the canonical scriptures. He was the favoured minister, who was commissioned to shew to Daniel the restoration of Jerusalem, the fate of monarchies, and those mighty events that were destined *to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy.* By him the birth of the Baptist was foretold to Zecharias ; and by him the incarnation of the Messiah was announced to the Holy Virgin.

A name so distinguished, the impostor Mahomet justly conceived, would be propitious to his designs : accordingly he pretended that his own revelations were transmitted to him from heaven by the ministration of the same angel.

To enter into a philosophical enquiry concerning the interposition of spirits in the affairs of men, is on the present occasion totally unnecessary. The fact involves no impos-

sibility; and till the relation in which this world may stand to the great system of the universe be fully and distinctly known, who shall dare to affirm that the actions of men are unknown or indifferent to moral and rational agents, who are endowed with nobler capacities, and employed in a more extensive sphere?

To metaphysical subtleties, which rest on gratuitous and arbitrary assumption, it is sufficient then to oppose the general and uniform belief of all ages, whether dark or enlightened, and of all countries, whether barbarous or civilized: but in the present enquiry we shall consider the interposition of angels only in an historical point of view, and shall dispute the pretensions of Mahomet on a principle which is equally admitted by the believers both of the Koran and of the Gospel.

As the pretended intercourse of Mahomet with the angel Gabriel rests solely on the suspicious authority of his own assertion, his pretensions will not admit of any serious attack or any plausible defence. But when he affirms that this divine messenger communicated to him revelations so inimitably sublime and beautiful, that they could not have

proceeded from any created being; when he defies both men and genii to produce any composition that should bear the least resemblance to his boasted Koran; when he boldly proposes it to the test of the severest examination, and holds it out to the admiration of the whole world as a tablet inscribed in legible characters by the finger of the Deity, then we have some opportunity for enquiry, and some foundation for argument.

Admitting, what can never be proved, this new hypothesis, that any composition may be so perfect as to transcend the powers of man, and rise to our ideas of a miracle; yet we peremptorily deny the conclusion, thus applied from it to the Koran. His infatuated followers regarded it as something too wonderful to be the work of one who professed himself to be both unlearned and ignorant: and the impostor himself declared it superior to the utmost reach of the most enlightened and cultivated mind!

If to confident assertions implicit belief were due, we might assent to each of these opinions: but if we turn our eyes, first upon the life of Mahomet, (which we have already reviewed,) and then on his Koran, which remains to be considered, we shall see no rea-

son either to glow with the raptures of the Mussulman, or to re-echo the boasts of the prophet.

By the advocates of Mahometism, the Koran has always been held forth as the greatest of miracles, and equally stupendous with the act of raising the dead. The miracles of Moses and Jesus, they say, were transient and temporary ; but that of the Koran is permanent and perpetual ; and therefore far surpasses all the miraculous events of preceding ages. We will not detract from the real merit of the Koran : we allow it to be generally elegant, and often sublime ; but at the same time we reject with disdain its arrogant pretence to any thing supernatural. As we before discovered the supposed ignorance of the author to be no other than an artful disguise which he assumed, to carry on more effectually his fraudulent designs ; we shall now as readily be convinced, that all the real excellence of the work is to be referred to natural and visible causes.

When the Arabs adopted the religion of Mahomet, all suspicions of his sincerity were lost in exultation at his success, and admiration of his character.

They did not pause to examine any abstract question on the consistence of his pre-

tended revelations. A bright and prominent example stood before them, which overwhelmed them with tumultuous amazement, and fascinated them into the most implicit confidence. His triumphs over enemies were considered as the most brilliant acquisitions to their national glory : and in the dexterity of his contrivance and the vigour of his execution they saw the sublime features of the hero of their country. His claims to a divine commission, attended with an exterior sanctity of demeanor, and supported by a long and splendid series of victories, confirmed them in their veneration for an instructor so eminently favoured, it should seem, by the interposition of heaven itself.

A confidence thus seemingly deserved, and thus liberally bestowed, would naturally lead the followers of Mahomet to overlook every imperfection, to enhance every excellence, to confound the seeming with the real, and to yield to the pretensions of the prophet the implicit submission they had already paid to the superiority of the warrior.

Under such impressions of admiration and astonishment, what could the uninformed Arabian oppose to the claim of divine inspiration? Or, while sharing in the glory of his arms, how pause to investigate the truth of those

pretensions, which, while they exalted his leader to communion with God, seemed to shed a portion of the same sanctity on his followers and friends?

In the language of Arabia also, a language extremely loved, and diligently cultivated by the people to whom it was vernacular, Mahomet found advantages which were never enjoyed by any former or succeeding impostor. It requires not the eye of a philosopher to discover in every soil and country a principle of national pride: and if we look back for many ages on the history of the Arabians, we shall easily perceive that pride among them invariably to have consisted in the knowledge and improvement of their native language. The Arabic, which has been justly esteemed the most copious of the Eastern tongues; which had existed from the remotest antiquity; which had been embellished by numberless poets, and refined by the constant exercise of the natives; was the most successful instrument which Mahomet employed in planting his new religion among them. Admirably adapted by its unrivalled harmony, and by its endless variety, to add painting to expression, and to pursue the imagination in its unbounded flight; it became in the hands of Mahomet an irresistible charm

to blind the judgment, and to captivate the fancy of his followers.

Of that description of men, who first composed the adherents of Mahomet, and to whom the Koran was addressed, few, probably, were able to pass a very accurate judgment on the propriety of the sentiments, or on the beauties of the diction: but all could judge of the military abilities of their leader; and in the midst of their admiration it is not difficult to conceive, that they would ascribe to his compositions every imaginary beauty of inspired language.

The shepherd and the soldier, though awake to the charms of those wild but beautiful compositions, in which were celebrated their favourite occupations of love or war, were yet little able to criticise any other works, than those which were addressed to the imagination, or the heart. To abstract reasonings on the attributes and the dispensations of the Deity, to the comparative excellencies of rival religions, to the consistency of any one religious system in all its parts, and to the force of its various proofs, they were quite inattentive. In such a situation the appearance of a work, which possessed something like wisdom and consistence; which prescribed the rules, and illustrated

the duties of life ; and which contained the principles of a new, and comparatively sublime theology ; independently of its real and permanent merit, was likely to excite their astonishment, and to become the standard of future composition.

In the first periods of the literature of every country, something of this kind has happened. The father of Grecian poetry very obviously influenced the taste and imitation of his countrymen. The modern nations of Europe all possess some original author, who, rising from the darkness of former ages, has begun the career of composition, and tinctured with the character of his own imagination the stream which has flowed through his posterity.

But the prophet of Arabia had in this respect advantages peculiar to himself. His compositions were not to his followers the works of man, but the genuine language of Heaven which had sent him. They were not confined therefore to that admiration, which is so liberally bestowed on the earliest productions of genius ; or to that fond attachment with which men every where regard the original compositions of their country : but with their admiration they blended their piety. To know and to feel the beauties of

the Koran, was in some respect to share in the temper of heaven ; and he who was most affected with admiration in the perusal of its beauties, seemed most fitly the object of that mercy, which had given it to ignorant man. The Koran, therefore, became naturally and necessarily the standard of taste. With a language thus hallowed in their imaginations, they were too well satisfied, either to dispute its elegance, or improve its structure. In succeeding ages the additional sanction of antiquity, or prescription, was given to those compositions which their fathers had admired : and while the belief of its divine original continues, that admiration, which has thus become the test and the duty of the faithful, can neither be altered nor diminished.

When therefore we consider these peculiar advantages of the Koran, we have no reason to be surprised at the admiration in which it is held. But, if, descending to a more minute investigation of it, we consider its perpetual inconsistency and absurdity, we shall indeed have cause for astonishment at that weakness of humanity, which could ever have received such compositions as the work of the Deity.

The first praise of all the productions of genius is invention ; that quality of the

mind, which, by the extent and quickness of its views, is capable of the largest conceptions, and of forming new combinations of objects the most distant and unusual. But the Koran bears little impression of this transcendent character. Its materials are wholly borrowed from the Jewish and Christian scriptures, from the Talmudical legends and apocryphal gospels then current in the East, and from the traditions and fables which abounded in Arabia. The materials collected from these several sources are here heaped together, with perpetual and needless repetitions, without any settled principle or visible connection.

When a great part of the life of Mahomet had been spent in preparatory meditation on the system he was about to establish, its chapters were dealt out slowly and separately during the long period of three and twenty years. Yet thus defective in its structure, and not less exceptionable in its doctrines, was the work which Mahomet delivered to his followers as the oracles of God.

The most prominent feature of the Koran, that point of excellence in which the partiality of its admirers has ever delighted to view it, is the sublime notion it generally impresses of the nature and attributes of God,

If its author had really derived these just conceptions from the inspiration of that Being whom they attempt to describe, they would not have been surrounded, as they now are on every side, with error and absurdity. But it might easily be proved, that whatever it justly defines of the divine attributes, was borrowed from our holy scripture; which even from its first promulgation, but especially from the completion of the New Testament, has extended the views, and enlightened the understandings of mankind; and thus furnished them with arms, which have too often been ineffectually turned against itself by its ungenerous enemies.

In this instance particularly, the copy is far below the great original, both in the propriety of its images, and the force of its descriptions. Our holy scriptures are the only compositions that can enable the dim sight of mortality to penetrate into the invisible world, and to behold a glimpse of the divine perfections. Accordingly, when they would represent to us the happiness of heaven, they describe it, not by any thing minute and particular, but by something general and great; something, that without descending to any determinate object, may at once, by its beauty and immensity, excite our wishes

and elevate our affections. Though in the prophetical and evangelical writings the joys that shall attend us in a future state are often mentioned with ardent admiration, they are expressed rather by allusion than similitude, rather by indefinite and figurative terms, than by any thing fixed and determinate. ^a *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* What a reverence and astonishment does this passage excite in every hearer of taste and piety! What energy, and at the same time what simplicity in the expression! How sublime, and at the same time how obscure is the imagery!

Different was the conduct of Mahomet in his descriptions of heaven and of paradise. Unassisted by the necessary influence of virtuous intentions and divine inspiration, he was neither desirous, nor indeed able, to exalt the minds of men to sublime conceptions, or to rational expectations. By attempting to explain what is inconceivable, to describe what is ineffable, and to materialize what in itself is spiritual, he absurdly and impiously aimed to sensualize the purity of the divine essence. Thus he fabricated a

^a 1 Cor. ii. 9.

system of incoherence, a religion of depravity, totally repugnant indeed to the nature of that Being, who, as he pretended, was its object; but therefore more likely to accord with the appetites and conceptions of a corrupt and sensual age.

That I may not appear to exalt our Scriptures thus far above the Koran by an unreasonable preference, I shall produce a part of the second chapter of the latter, which is deservedly admired by the Mahometans, who wear it engraved on their ornaments, and recite it in their prayers.

“^b God! there is no God but he; the living, the self-subsisting: neither slumber nor sleep seizeth him: to him belongeth whatsoever is in heaven, and on earth. Who is he that can intercede with him but through his good pleasure? He knoweth that which is past, and that which is to come. His throne is extended over heaven and earth, and the preservation of both is to him no burden. He is the high, the mighty.”

To this description who can refuse the praise of magnificence? Part of that magnificence however is to be referred to that verse of the Psalmist, whence it was borrowed, ^c *He*

^b Sale's Kor. ii. p. 30. 4to edit.

^c Psal. cxxi. 4.

that keepeth Israel, shall neither slumber, nor sleep.

But if we compare it with that other passage of the same inspired Psalmist, all its boasted grandeur is at once obscured, and lost in the blaze of a greater light.

^d *O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days; thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old, as doth a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

The Koran, therefore, upon a retrospective view of these several circumstances, far from supporting its arrogant claim to a supernatural work, sinks below the level of many compositions confessedly of human original; and still lower does it fall in our estimation, when compared with that pure and perfect pattern which we justly admire in the scriptures of truth.

It being then abundantly apparent, that no miracle either was externally performed for the support, or is internally involved in the composition, of the Mahometan revela-

^d Psal. cii. 24, 25, 26, 27.

tion, we proceed to enquire, whether it be better attested by prophecy, that other grand evidence of a mission from heaven.

The knowledge of futurity is one of the most unequivocal and incommunicable characters of the most High. By this he stamps a seal on the genuine illapses of his spirit, and distinguishes them from the visions of enthusiasm and the fables of imposture. Of this Mahomet was conscious, and endeavoured to avail himself. Sensible of the credibility that arises from the evidence of prophecy, he appealed to prophecy for the authenticity of his mission.

There were no popular prophetic traditions among the Arabians, that might be wrested to favour his pretensions. The Jewish and Christian scriptures, therefore, which he acknowledged as divine, were the only sources whence he could attempt to derive any predictions of his coming.

Though the later advocates of the Mahometan cause have laboured to discover such predictions in our Bible in its present form, we know that it contains nothing to countenance their attempt. So weak a claim the great pretender himself forbore to allege; and more artfully rested his pretensions on a falsehood, which, though still more absurd

and improbable, is, by its very absurdity, more difficult to be disproved. He frequently and boldly affirmed, that his mission had been foretold by the prophets in the Hebrew testament, and more particularly by Christ in the Gospel: and that both Jews and Christians, expecting his coming, and dreading his success, had concurred in the atrocious crime of mutilating their scriptures; and, to deprive him of the testimony those prophecies afforded, had expunged them from the sacred pages.

But the idea of this pretended corruption of the sacred writings draws after it a train of the most improbable conclusions. That the most discordant sects had united in destroying an article of their own faith, for the unaccountable purpose of discrediting a person to be born in a future age; and that their attempt succeeded in thus mutilating a book dispersed through every country in every language, is among the consequences of this extraordinary hypothesis. But we have the strongest reasons to believe, that our holy scriptures, by the care of a good Providence, have descended to us pure and perfect, from their original times.

There is indeed no evidence of the authenticity of any compositions, but what equally

attends the books of the Old and New Testament. Nay, there are no ancient writings, which bear such peculiar and discriminating characteristics of authenticity. Their importance made them subjects of deep attention and consideration; and their authority occasioned them to be appealed to by Christians of every persuasion. Different sects watched over them with a jealous eye, lest they should be corrupted; and as each made them a standard, each contributed to preserve their identity.

To confirm us still further in this opinion, we have the concurring testimony of many ancient writers, of the primitive fathers of the church, and of heretics who maintained the most clashing and opposite tenets; whose scriptural quotations, though made with different views from different copies, all uniformly refer to one and the same Bible. The very exceptions to this general position are few, and contribute additional proofs in favour of the sacred text: for every mutilation, however inconsiderable, every depravation, however artful, to which the rage of controversy had given birth, were instantly detected by the activity, and exposed by the indignation, of the opposite party.

There are extant at this day various ma-

nuscripts of both testaments, much older than the Hejra. Such are the Vatican and Alexandrian manuscripts; the dates of which are generally ascribed by the critics to the fourth or fifth century. In these we nowhere find any mention of Mahomet, or any other allusion to his coming, than the general prediction, *that false Christs and false prophets should arise.*

But to enter at large into this subject is neither consistent with my plan, nor indeed necessary to my argument; since a slight consideration of these obvious proofs will afford the clearest conviction, that those imaginary prophecies which Mahomet alleged, if they had ever existed in the sacred volume, would have existed still; and in truth, that no such corruption as he pretended has ever happened to our scriptures.

Thus was a man of no common talents reduced by the very nature of his enterprise to bear record of himself, to support his own cause by his own unsupported testimony, and to maintain a weak and defenceless claim by a futile and absurd appeal to prophecies which had no existence.

It appears then, that the pretensions of Mahomet are not accompanied by any of those marks of external evidence, which may

always be expected to confirm and to distinguish a divine revelation. The proofs which he adduced in support of his claims are, in every point of view, weak and unsatisfactory. To miraculous power, that most infallible and decisive test of divine interposition, he openly disclaimed every pretence; and even boldly denied its necessity to confirm the mission of a prophet. He deemed it sufficient to appeal to a secret and unattested intercourse with an angel; and above all, to the inimitable excellence and sublimity of the Koran. To the former of these pretences no serious attention is due; for, instead of affording any evidence in support of the claims of Mahomet, it notoriously wants proofs to establish its own authenticity. With regard to the boasted excellence of the Koran, which, as the impostor alleged, bore strong and visible characters of an almighty hand, and was designed by God to compensate the want of miraculous power, and to supply every defect of external evidence, we have already seen how ill-founded are its haughty and arrogant pretensions to a divine original.

From a view of the real merits of that celebrated work, and from a consideration of the peculiar circumstances under which it was written and delivered to the world; from

its want of invention, of order, of consistency; from the real character and abilities of its author; and from the signal advantages which he enjoyed in a language copious and expressive, harmonious and refined; in the years which were spent in previous meditation, and the still longer space which was afterwards employed in its composition; and above all, in the opinions, the habits, and the prejudices of his countrymen; I say, from a due consideration of these important particulars, we are fully justified in resolving all its merit and all its success into the agency of ordinary and human causes.

But the evidence, which Mahomet alleged in support of the character he had assumed, was not only in itself fallacious and equivocal; we may also trace plain marks of imposture in the manner in which that evidence was proposed and enforced. Sensible of the weakness of his credentials, and of the suspicion to which the proofs he had adduced were justly liable, he anxiously laboured to mislead the unwary, and to confound the ignorant by the arrogance of his claims, and the confidence of his assertions.

Thus, instead of delivering his pretended revelation to his followers, and leaving it to stand or fall by the determination of their

own cool and dispassionate judgment, he endeavoured to anticipate their opinions, employed every artifice to enhance its merit, and embraced every opportunity to exaggerate its excellence by the most pompous and elaborate encomiums on its perfection.

Hence arose his bold and haughty defiance of the united powers of every order of created beings, to produce a work of equal beauty and sublimity with the miraculous Koran; hence too proceeded his groundless, yet ostentatious appeal to the testimony of the ancient prophets; from whose writings he was confessedly unable to produce a single prediction, which could, with any probability of construction, be wrested to favour his pretensions.

Compelled by the nature of his situation and design to support one impious falsehood by another still more atrocious, the artifice and the audacity of the impostor carried him yet farther; and, in order to afford some countenance to his extravagant appeal to the evidence of prophecy, induced him to charge both Jews and Christians with the odious but impossible crime of corrupting their scriptures.

Such were the vain pretences, and such the unsubstantial proofs, by which the pro-

phet of Arabia laboured to confirm and to authenticate his mission. But far different was the conduct, and different the evidence, which was adduced by Jesus Christ, in support of his claim to the character and office of the Messiah.

Into this contrast, however, the time will not at present permit me to enter. The consideration of that long and astonishing train of Miracles, and of that equally stupendous chain of Prophecies, on whose collective evidence, as on a firm and immovable basis, our holy religion ultimately rests, would unavoidably lead me into too wide a field of investigation.

The infinite importance of the subjects naturally demands our most serious and earnest attention, and is, I trust, sufficient fully to justify me in reserving them as objects of future and more particular discussion.

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Into this contrast, however, the time will not at present permit me to enter. The consideration of that long and astonishing train of Miracles, and of that equally stupendous chain of Prophecies, on whose collective evidence, as on a firm and immovable basis, our holy religion ultimately rests, would inevitably lead me into too wide a field of investigation.

The infinite importance of the subject naturally demands our most serious and earnest attention, and is, I trust, sufficient to justify me in reserving them as objects of future and more particular discussion.

It is now a pleasure which we cannot but feel, to turn our eyes and our minds to the

consideration of the

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SERMON VII.

JOHN x. 25.

*Jesus answered—The works that I do in my Father's name,
they bear witness of me.*

HAVING in my last discourse endeavoured to expose that empty shew of external evidence, by which the Arabian impostor laboured to support his impious pretensions, I now proceed, in pursuance of my general plan, to examine and state the proofs on which Jesus Christ rested his claim to the character of a divine teacher. In the words which I have now read to you, our Lord replies to the captious questions of the Jews concerning his dignity and office; and refers them to the Miracles which he wrought, as affording plain and undeniable evidence of his mission.

Every one knows what is meant by a Miracle; though divines have differed about the precise terms of definition. Some have defined it in language too loose and equivocal, and have thus confounded that which is unaccountable with that which is miracu-

lous: others, to avoid this extreme, have so narrowed the definition as to make it inapplicable even to events which are truly entitled to that denomination. I will not attempt to give such a definition as shall be exact, without being defective; and comprehensive, without being redundant. It is sufficient to say, that by a Miracle I mean “An event out of the ordinary and settled course of nature, and such as could not have been produced either by the operation of its general laws, or the combination of contingent circumstances:” Or—“An operation performed by any particular agent, which transcends his skill and power, and which required the assistance of a supernatural being.”

^a A celebrated champion of infidelity has insidiously or erroneously maintained a Miracle to be contrary to experience; whereas it is in reality only different from it. Experience informs us, that *one* event has happened often—testimony informs us that *another* event has happened once, or more. That diseases should be *generally* cured by the application of external causes, and *sometimes* at the mere word of a prophet, and without the visible application of causes, are

^a Mr. Hume.

facts not inconsistent with each other in the nature of things themselves, or irreconcilable according to our ideas. Each fact may arise from its own proper cause; each may exist independently of the other; and each is known by its own proper proof, be it of sense or testimony. As secret causes often produce events contrary to those we *do* expect from experience, it is equally conceivable that events should sometimes be produced which we do *not* expect.

To pronounce therefore a Miracle to be false, because it is different from experience, is only to conclude against its general existence from the very circumstance which constitutes its particular nature: for if it were not different from experience, where would be its singularity? Or what particular proof could be drawn from it, if it happened according to the ordinary train of human events, or was included in the operation of the general laws of nature? We grant that it does differ from experience; but we do not presume to make our experience the standard of the divine conduct. He that acknowledges a God, must at least admit the possibility of a Miracle. The Atheist that makes him inseparable from what is called nature, and binds him to its laws by an insurmount-

able necessity ; that deprives him of will, and wisdom, and power, as a distinct and independent Being ; may deny even the very possibility of a miraculous interposition, which can in any instance suspend or counteract those general laws by which the world is governed. But he who allows of a first cause in itself perfect and intelligent, abstractedly from those effects which his wisdom and power have produced, must at the same time allow, that this cause can be under no such restraints as to be debarred the liberty of controlling its laws as often as it sees fit. Surely the Being that made the world can govern it, or any part of it, in such a manner as he pleases ; and he that constituted the very laws by which it is in general conducted, may suspend the operation of those laws in any given instance ; or impress new powers on matter, in order to produce new and extraordinary effects.

Here indeed it is proper for me to observe, that the force exerted in every Miracle is finite, and may, in many cases, be in itself far less than what we see employed in the ordinary course of the world. The sudden suspension of the force, which preserves any one planet in its orbit, is less than the constant exercise of that force, which preserves

all the planets in their respective orbits ; and yet it may be properly miraculous. It is not therefore necessary to say, that Miracles cannot be performed by a power less than infinite. That no beings can change, or counteract, or supersede the order of things, as established by the Deity, without his appointment, is indeed the clear and necessary consequence of his omnipotence : but that he may appoint them to change it, involves no contradiction : that purposes of the highest moment may be answered by such appointment, implies no absurdity ; and, therefore, in the case of Miracles, whether the Deity performs them immediately by himself, or mediately by other agents, the great ends of religion are equally secured, and the proofs of his interposition may be equally luminous.

Miracles may be classed under two heads : those which consist in a *train* or *combination of events*, which could not have resulted from the ordinary arrangements of Providence ; and those *particular operations* which are performed by instruments and agents incompetent to effect them without a preternatural power.

In the conduct of Providence respecting the Jewish people, from the earliest periods

of their existence, as a distinct class of society, to the present time, we behold a singularity of circumstance and procedure, which we cannot account for on common principles. Comparing their condition and situation with that of other nations, we can meet with nothing similar to it in the history of mankind. So remarkable a difference, conspicuous in every revolution of their history, could not have subsisted through mere accident. There must have been a cause adequate to so extraordinary an effect. Now, what should this cause be, but an interposition of Providence in a manner different from the course of its general government?—for the phenomenon cannot be explained by an application of those general causes and effects that operate in other cases.

The original propagation of Christianity was likewise an event, which clearly discovered a miraculous interposition. The circumstances which attended it were such, as cannot rationally be accounted for on any other postulatam. I have already considered this subject at large. I would now observe, that the institutions of the Law and the Gospel may not only appeal for their confirmation to a *train of events*, which, taken in

a general and combined view, point out an extraordinary designation, and vindicate their claim to a divine authority; but also to a number of *particular operations*, which, considered distinctly, or in a separate and detached light, evidently display a supernatural power, immediately exerted on the occasion.

Since Christ himself constantly appealed to these works as the evidences of his divine mission and character, we will briefly examine how far they justified and confirmed his pretensions.

That our Lord laid the greatest stress on the evidence they afforded; nay, that he considered that evidence as sufficient to authenticate his claims to the office of the Messiah with all reasonable and well-disposed enquirers, is manifest, not only from the words of my text, but also from a great variety of other passages in the Evangelists.

Thus, when the disciples of John were sent to Christ, to receive from his own lips the most satisfactory proofs of his divine mission, he referred them to his Miracles.

Go, said he, and shew to John again those things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are

raised up. Again, 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not : but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.

This appeal to Miracles was founded on the following just and obvious grounds.

FIRST, that they are visible proofs of divine approbation, as well as of divine power : for it would have been inconclusive to have rested an appeal on the testimony of the latter, if it had not at the same time included an evidence of the former : and it was indeed a natural inference, that working of Miracles in defence of a particular cause, was the seal of Heaven to the truth of that cause. To suppose the contrary, would be to suppose, that God not only permitted his creatures to be deceived ; but that he deviated from the ordinary course of his providence, purposely with a view to deceive them. The conclusion which the man, whom our Saviour restored to sight, drew from this Miracle, was exceedingly just, and founded on the common sentiments and impressions of the human heart. *⁠We know, says he, that God heareth not sinners : but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind*

^c John x. 25.

^d John ix. 31, 32.

If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. If the cause which our Lord was engaged in had not been approved of by God, it would not have been honoured with the seal of Miracles: for the divine power can never be supposed to counteract the divine will. This would be to set his nature at variance with itself; and, by destroying his simplicity, would destroy his happiness, and terminate in confusion and misery.

Hence we may justly reject as incredible those Miracles, which have been ascribed to the interposition of wicked spirits. The possibility of their interference is a mere hypothesis, depending upon gratuitous assumption, and leading to very dangerous consequences: and the particular instances, in which credulous superstition, or perverted philosophy, has supposed them to interfere, are, as Facts, destitute of any clear and solid evidence, or as Effects, often resolvable into natural causes.

SECONDLY, when our Lord appealed to his Miracles as proofs of his divine mission, it presupposed that those Miracles were of such a nature as would bear the strictest examination; that they had all those criteria, which could possibly distinguish them from

the delusions of enthusiasm, and the artifices of imposture; else the appeal would have been fallacious and equivocal.

He appealed to them with all the confidence of an upright mind, totally possessed with a consciousness of their truth and reality. This appeal was not drawn out into any laboured argument, nor adorned by any of the embellishments of language. It was short, simple, and decisive. He neither reasoned nor declaimed on their nature, or their design. He barely pointed to them as plain and indubitable facts, such as spoke their own meaning, and carried with them their own authority.

The Miracles which our Lord performed were too public to be suspected of imposture; and, being objects of sense, they were secured against the charge of enthusiasm. An impostor would not have acted so absurdly, as to have risked his credit on the performance of what he must have known it was not in his power to effect. And though an enthusiast, from the warmth of imagination, might have flattered himself with a full persuasion of his being able to perform some miraculous work; yet when the trial was referred to an object of sense, the event must

soon have exposed the delusion. The impostor would not have dared to say to the blind, *Receive thy sight*, to the deaf, *Hear*, to the dumb, *Speak*, to the dead, *Arise*, to the raging of the sea, *Be still*; lest he should injure the credit of his cause, by undertaking more than he could perform. And though the enthusiast, under the delusion of his passions, might have confidently commanded disease to fly, and the powers of nature to be subject to his control; yet their obedience would not have followed his command.

The Miracles of Christ then were such as an impostor would not have attempted; and such as an enthusiast could not have effected. They had no disguise; and were in a variety of instances of such a nature, as to preclude the very possibility of collusion. They were performed in the midst of his bitterest enemies; and were so palpable and certain, as to extort the following acknowledgment even from persons who were most eager to oppose his doctrines, and to discredit his pretensions: *“This man doeth many Miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.”*

The Miracles Christ performed were in-

• John xi. 47, 48.

deed sufficient to alarm the fears of those whose downfall was involved in his success. And it was impossible for them to deny the facts, which so many thousands were ready to attest on evidence too certain to admit even the possibility of mistake, delusion, or imposture. But his enemies, who admitted their reality and yet resisted their design, by not acknowledging the person who wrought them to be the Messiah, had recourse to the most impious and most absurd suppositions, in order to evade their evidence. The heathen imputed them to some occult power of magic; and thus applied what has no existence in nature, in order to account for a phenomenon that existed out of its common course. The stories of the Jews, who confessed the Miracles, but denied what they were intended to establish, are too ridiculous to be mentioned. I must not however omit to take notice of the wicked and blasphemous cavil of the Pharisees, and the noble reply which our Lord made to it. They could not deny the fact, but they imputed it to the agency of an infernal spirit. *‘This fellow, said they, doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every*

^f Matt. xii. 24.

kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

The purity of the doctrine which was taught by our blessed Lord was totally adverse to the kingdom of darkness. It tended to overthrow it, by the introduction of principles far different from those which Satan would inspire, and by prosecuting objects totally opposite to those which that wicked and malignant spirit would us tempt to pursue: so that in proportion to the prevalence of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of Satan would of course be diminished. Now, supposing Miracles to be in the power of an infernal spirit, can it be imagined that he would communicate an ability of performing them to persons, who were counteracting his designs? Would he by them give credit to a cause, that tended to bring his own into disgrace?

Thus, as our Saviour appealed to Miracles as proofs of his power; so he appealed to the inherent worth and purity of the doctrines they were intended to bear witness to, as a proof that the power was of God. In this manner do the external and internal evi-

dences give and receive mutual confirmation, and mutual lustre.

The truth of the Christian religion does not, however, wholly depend on the Miracles wrought by its divine Founder, though sufficient in themselves to establish his claims: but, in order to give the evidence of Miracles the strongest force they could possibly acquire, that evidence was extended still farther; and the same power that our Lord possessed was communicated to his disciples, and their more immediate successors. Whilst yet on earth, he imparted to them this extraordinary gift, as the seal of their commission, when he sent them to preach the gospel: and after his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, they were endowed with powers yet more stupendous. Sensible of the validity of this kind of evidence, the apostles of our Lord, with the same artless simplicity, and the same boldness of conscious integrity, which distinguished their great Master, constantly insisted upon the Miracles they wrought, as strong and undeniable proofs of the truth of their doctrines. Thus the Miracles of our blessed Lord may be justly considered as the evidence of his divine mission and character.

If we consider their nature, their greatness,

and their number; and if to this consideration we add that which respects their end and design, we must acknowledge, that no one could have performed them, unless God was with him. They were too public to be the artifices of imposture; too substantial and too numerous, to afford the slightest suspicion of undesigned and fortuitous coincidence. In a word, supposing that the divine Being should in any instance so far counteract the common laws of nature, as to produce a Miracle; and should design that Miracle as a monument to future times of the truth of any particular doctrine, we cannot conceive any mode of communicating it more effectual than that which he has chosen. Stronger proofs could not be afforded, consistently with the design of the gospel, which is not to overpower our understandings by an irresistible and compulsory light, but to afford us such rational evidence as is sufficient to satisfy moral enquirers, who are endowed with faculties to perceive the truth; but at the same time who also have power totally to resist it, and finally to forfeit all its blessings.

It would lead me too far to pursue the subject of Miracles in detail. What I have to urge may be, however, comprised under the following heads.

These Miracles were of a nature too palpable to be mistaken. They were the objects of sense ; and not the precarious speculations of reason concerning what God might do ; or the chimerical suggestions of fancy concerning what he did. The facts were recorded by those who must know whether they were true or false. The persons who recorded them were under no possible temptations to deceive the world. We can only account for their conduct on the supposition of their most perfect conviction, and disinterested zeal. That they should assert what they knew to be false ; that they should publish it with so much ardour ; that they should risk every thing dear to humanity, in order to maintain it ; and at last submit to death, in order to attest their persuasion of its truth in those moments when imposture usually drops its mask, and enthusiasm loses its confidence ; that they should act thus in opposition to every dictate of common sense, and every principle of common honesty, every restraint of shame, and every impulse of selfishness ; is a phenomenon not less irreconcilable to the moral state of things than Miracles are to the natural constitution of the world. Falsehood naturally entangles men in contradiction, and confounds them

with dismay: but the love of truth invigorates the mind; the consciousness of integrity anticipates the approbation of God; and conscience creates a fortitude, to which mere unsupported nature is often a stranger.^s

The divine mission of our blessed Lord was not only supported by a variety of Miracles which carried with them every mark of a supernatural power, and were immediate and visible evidences of the concurrence of the great Ruler of nature in that cause which they were brought to defend; but it was illustrated and confirmed by a train of Prophecies, which, beginning with the fall, opened with greater lustre and with a wider prospect, as the fulness of time drew near, in which they were to receive their accomplishment.

To Prophecies then, as well as Miracles, both Christ and his Apostles frequently appealed, as proofs of his mission. But he did not, like Mahomet, build his pretensions on some predictions that had no existence; or on others of which the conveyance was traditionary, and the meaning was equivocal. On the contrary, he appealed to those that were actually contained in public and solemn

^s For some further observations on Miracles, see the Notes.

records, and which had been preserved for ages, with the care and reverence which was due to their high authority and momentous import. These records were preserved in the hands of his enemies, who admitted their divinity, and were well informed of their contents, so that he could not be accused of supporting his claims by doubtful and disgraceful evidence; by writings which long neglect had obscured, or insidious artifice had mutilated; by inferences from preceding records, which could not be contradicted, or by assumptions, which lay out of the reach of serious and direct confutation. Nor less in nature and quality, than in origin and credit, were the Prophecies which our Lord appealed to; unlike those which Mahomet pretended to adduce in his favour: or those which his infatuated followers in later ages affected to discover in the scriptures, and which they have wrested with more absurdity than plausibility in support of their prophet.

The Prophecies which respect the Messiah are neither few in number, nor vague and equivocal in their reference; but numerous, pointed, and particular. They bear on them those discriminating marks by which divine inspiration may be distinguished from the conjectures of human sagacity; and a neces-

sary or probable event, from a casual and uncertain contingency. They are such as cannot be referred to the dictates of mere natural penetration, because they are not confined to general occurrences; but point out with singular exactness a variety of minute circumstances relating to times, places, and persons, which were neither objects of foresight nor conjecture, because they were not necessarily connected with the principal event, or even probable either in themselves or in their relation. They were such as could only have occurred to a mind that was under the immediate influence of the divinity, by which distant periods were revealed, and the secrets of unborn ages disclosed.

The scheme of Prophecy, considered in its first opening, its gradual advance, and its final and full completion in the advent, the ministry, the death, and resurrection of the Messiah, and the extensive progress of his gospel among the Gentiles, together with its blessed influence on individuals, societies, countries, and the whole race of mankind; is an object the greatest and most sublime that imagination can conceive; and the most pleasing and important that the human mind can contemplate.

We behold the promise of a Redeemer

given to our first parents immediately after the fall, in obscure and general terms. It foretold a victory that would be gained over the enemy that had deceived and conquered them; a victory the most illustrious in its effects and consequences; and which should amply revenge on the *serpent's head* the evils and miseries which he had introduced into the world.

We behold the promise renewed in somewhat clearer language to the Patriarchs; particularly to Abraham, the great father of the faithful.

Here the great purposes of Providence begin to disclose themselves with a fuller and brighter lustre at every step. With this venerable patriarch the Almighty condescended to enter into a peculiar covenant; and, to excite his obedience, he promised to raise up from him a great nation; to take him and his family under his immediate patronage; and to make all the nations of the earth blessed through him^s.

The latter part of this promise is peculiarly memorable, as containing in it the proper end for which God had chosen and separated him and his posterity. It is very fitly made by the sacred writers the foundation

^s Gen. xxii. 17, 18. xxvi. 4.

of God's dispensations to him; and may be regarded as a mark to direct the reader to the great object, to which they ultimately referred.

The scene opens with one man; and extends itself wider and wider, till we see the light of divine truth diffusing its influence over the earth by Jesus Christ, who according to the flesh sprang from his loins; and fulfilled the promise made unto the Father, that *in Isaac should his seed be called*.

We first see the promise of God to this ancient Patriarch fulfilled by giving him a son, contrary to all human expectations. The next grand step of its accomplishment was in the twelve Patriarchs. We see them, through the amazing, and, to human view, incomprehensible direction of divine Providence, settled in Egypt; and, through the influence of Joseph, who miraculously became a person of distinguished credit and consequence in the court of Pharaoh, treated with peculiar respect; and indulged with allotments, which made their situation not merely commodious, but even splendid.

At length the scene changes, but the great drama is still carried on. Its intricacies are unravelling, and its design unfolds itself more and more. For what can baffle eternal wis-

dom? Or what can counteract the might of omnipotence? The posterity of Israel are subjected to the tyranny of a king, *that knew not Joseph*. They are oppressed, and harassed, and reduced to the most abject state of penury and servitude. Their cries, however, enter into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; and a deliverer is sent.

He first attempts to deliver them by the voluntary consent of Pharaoh. He endeavours to convince their oppressor, by the most awful and stupendous Miracles, that God was with his people of a truth; that he would avenge their wrongs; and that he who opposed them fought against heaven. But the haughty spirit of Pharaoh disdained submission; though conscience sometimes was appalled, and made him anticipate what he had neither the courage to defy, nor the virtue to prevent. When arguments which he was unable to confute, aided by miracles he was unable to deny, could not shake him from his purpose; when every concession was retracted, as soon as it was made; when stubbornness and irresolution actuated him alternately, and craft was called in to the aid of violence; Moses by the command of the most High endeavoured to rescue this oppressed people by force.

In spite of opposition, and contrary to all human prospect of success in the arduous and hazardous enterprise, he left Egypt; resolved to resist if pursued, and to die rather than to return to the house of bondage. Under the greatest disadvantages, and amidst appearances the most unpromising, this great man, supported by the arm of omnipotence, conducted his followers out of the land of Egypt: and, that God might shew his power, and give them the most undeniable proof of his divine patronage, he led them designedly out of the direct and common path, and brought them to the Red sea. There the Lord made bare his arm, opened a passage in the deep, and guided them through, as on dry land. Miracles were displayed to animate their hopes, as well as to dispel their fears. Their escape had the air of a triumph: where they had passed through safely, the Egyptian hosts were overwhelmed with destruction.

The difficulties which this people struggled with in a barren and dangerous wilderness were peculiarly great: difficulties which were heightened still by their own ingratitude, discontent, and unbelief. They laboured under all the calamities of pestilence, of famine, and of war; they had all the rage of the ele-

ments, and all the desolations of the earth, to contend with. Yet still amidst these intricate and perilous paths, through which they were called to wander, the unerring purpose of God was neither frustrated, nor impeded. The plot, viewed only in broken and detached scenes, was embarrassed and involved ; but there was an Almighty presider over every successive event, who, by a gradual evolution of his designs, conferred order and consistency on the whole.

When they were parched with thirst, then did omnipotence cause even the flinty rock to flow for their refreshment ; when hungry and faint with the toils of the day, then did heaven supply them with its own manna, and sent quails into their camp to satisfy their extreme necessities. By the same power the walls of a fortified city fell to the ground : ^h*and the sun and moon stood still in their habitation* at the voice of the leader of Israel.

Armies renowned for battle, and commanded by skilful and powerful leaders, *were driven asunder* (to use the expressive language of scripture) *like the foam upon the waters, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn*ⁱ. Surely we may say, God was with

^h Hab. iii. 11.

ⁱ Hos. x. 7. Job xxiv. 24

this people. He led on their victorious bands ; conducted them over Jordan, and at last settled them in the land promised to their forefathers. Here he established his throne, and erected his temple. Here he delivered the great statutes of his kingdom, the laws of righteousness, and the ordinances of distinction. Here too, by the mouth of all his holy prophets, he gradually disclosed the several particulars of the grand and mysterious scheme of man's redemption ; and here he at length accomplished them in that great event, which included the result of all.

The important purpose, for which the Jews *in general* had been thus miraculously separated from the rest of mankind, was evidently to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, by preserving and transmitting the worship, the promises, and the predictions of the Almighty to future generations. The *particular* separation of one tribe from the great body of the Jewish nation was plainly an act of the same divine power, and became, in a manner equally striking, subservient to the accomplishment of the same great design.

As he who was to bless all the families of the earth was to spring from the seed of Abraham, so it was foretold that he should arise

out of the tribe of Judah, which was a particular branch of that general stock. For the sake of preserving a recorded lineage in uninterrupted succession, this tribe was kept distinct amidst every revolution of the Jewish nation: and amidst the depressions and changes of its various states, as it had been foretold by Jacob, Judah maintained within itself a peculiar prerogative and dignity, till the great end, which was to be effected by its separation from the other tribes of Israel, as well as from the world in general, was accomplished. The prophecy limited the period when this end would be fully answered; even when Shiloh, or the Messiah, should come: and then its authority should cease, and the very ensigns and badges of its former dignity and preeminence should be no more: the sceptre should depart from Judah; and its law-giver should lose all authority to enact laws, and all power to enforce them^k.

The scene of Prophecy opened with a clearer and more majestic view to David and the Prophets. David foretold the change of the order of the priesthood by the Messiah; the office he should himself sustain; the sufferings he should undergo; and the glorious triumphs he should enjoy from his resurrec-

^k Gen. xlix. 10.

tion, his ascension, and the extensive propagation of his gospel¹.

In process of time it disclosed secrets still more inscrutable to human penetration; and unfolded, to the astonished eye, events and circumstances that were beyond the power of imagination to conceive, or of expectation to anticipate: events of which present appearances gave no intimation; and circumstances so totally independent of the general occurrences of the world, that supposing the latter to have been foreseen, yet the former would not have been conjectured.

The Prophets have not only foretold in general terms a great revolution that would take place in the world by the coming of the Messiah, but they have delineated some particular circumstances attending it, which only the eye of omniscience could have foreseen. They have marked out the precise^m time andⁿ place of our Saviour's birth; they have described with wonderful exactness the distinguishing features of his office and character: they have displayed with equal beauty and truth the effects and consequences of his advent: and through all their predictions something pointing to the Messiah either by direct application, or by

¹ Psal. ii. 6, &c. cx. 1, &c. ^m Dan. ix. 24, &c. ⁿ Mic. v. 2.

secondary and distant reference, is so interwoven with the general contexture, the universal scheme of Prophecy, that, by keeping it in our eye, we shall be furnished with a clue to trace out their ultimate design, and contemplate their mutual connection with, and dependence on, each other; *for the Testimony of Jesus is the spirit of Prophecy.* This is its ruling and its vital principle. Divested of this, it loses its spirit and its power. We behold no consistency. The impression of its dignity is weakened; its object is debased; its end is darkened. But, viewed in this light, we behold in it a harmony which delights; a grandeur which astonishes: and from the result of the whole arises such evidence as carries conviction to the understanding.

The prophet Isaiah has particularly foretold, that the Messiah should be born of ° a virgin, and that he should descend from the family of ¢ David, which was a particular branch of the tribe of Judah. While he points out his miraculous birth, and describes his descent, he pourtrays his character in colours so striking and distinguishing, as to render its appropriation to Christ obvious to every one who compares the picture with

• Isaiah vii. 14.

¢ Ibid. ix. 6, 7. xi. 1, 2.

the original. It was this holy Prophet that foretold, that the Messiah should be ^a destitute of outward power or influence to attract the esteem, and ensure the attachment, of the world; that though in the eye of God he should be ^r *the chief corner-stone*, elect, precious; yet that he should be ^s *a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence* to men who were guided by the springs which in general actuate the human breast, such as interest, ambition, and the love of sensual enjoyments: and particularly it was foretold, that the ^t *Jews should fall on this rock*; should refuse to build on him as the only foundation of their hopes; but should, in their attempt to shake and overthrow it, be themselves scattered and broken to pieces. The same Prophet declared, that he should ^u veil the eyes of the wise and learned, and preach the gospel to the poor and illiterate; that he should ^x restore sight to the blind, health to the diseased, and light to those who had been oppressed with darkness; that he should teach the true and perfect way, and should be the great instructor of the Gentiles; that ^y kings should fall down before him, and all nations pay him homage and obedience; that his

^a Isaiah liii. 1, 2, 3. ^r xxviii. 16. ^s viii. 14, 15. ^t Ibid.

^u vi. 9, 10, 11. ^x xlii. 1, &c. ^y lx. 10.

reign should be gentle and benevolent ; and that the influence of his gospel should harmonize the jarring^z passions of mankind, and, ^a together with the knowledge and worship of the true God, establish peace and purity on the earth.

In the fifty-third chapter, the Prophet gives a most striking and affecting picture of the temper and behaviour of the Messiah amidst the most distressing and humiliating scenes through which he passed. His death, considered as the great propitiation for the sins of the whole world, was an object of such vast importance, that it pleased the divine Being strongly to mark the more distinguishing circumstances of it in prophetic language ; to the end that our faith in him might have every evidence to confirm it that was necessary to give satisfaction to modest and impartial enquirers. The fact in every respect corresponded with the prediction ; and so far was the Prophet introduced into the secret counsels of the divine mind, that when he spoke of future events, he appears to be relating their past history : for to that omniscient God, whose light directed the Prophet's eye through the darkest recesses of distant ages, prescience and accomplishment are the

^z Isaiah lv. 13.

lvi. 6, 7, 8.

same ; and the future and the past form but one object. Hence the most striking scenes of our Lord's passion are delineated by the prophetic pencil with the same truth and exactness, as if they had been drawn on the spot when the secret volume of the divine decrees was unrolled, and when that which had been foreseen in vision was exhibited in reality ^b.

The ancient Prophecies concerning ^c the rude insults and the ungracious taunts of the people ; their casting lots for his vesture, and parting his garments amongst them ; ^d the soldiers' attack on his dead body ; and his being lodged after death in ^e the sepulchre of the rich ; literally describe those circumstances which did in fact attend the passion of our blessed Lord.

Prophecy became more clear and illustrious, as *the day-spring from on high* advanced. Its last period succeeded the return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon : and the three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, give a striking account of the character and office of the Messiah ; and of the glorious effects of his advent.

I have not time to enlarge on the particu-

^b Compare Mark xv. 27, 28.

^c Psal. xxii. 7, 18.

^d Zech. xii. 10.

^e Isai. liii. 9.

lar nature and distinct objects of those later Prophecies ; nor to point out their immediate correspondence with the facts to which they related, and by which they were illustrated and fulfilled. It will be sufficient to speak of them with a general reference ; and their application to our blessed Lord will be obvious to every one that has the slightest knowledge of the great end of his mission, and of the means which he made use of to accomplish that end ^f.

Thus the completion of distant and unconnected Prophecies in the life and character, the sufferings and the triumphs, of our blessed Saviour, point him out as the *Messiah which was to come* ; and, in concurrence with the Miracles he wrought, form a system of external evidence, illustrious, harmonious, and convincing.

The time will not permit me to enlarge on the striking Prophecies of our blessed Lord : but they were such as gave additional evidence to his divine character, and clearly proved him to be filled with a spirit more than human. He uttered numerous Predictions of events altogether improbable on the ground of present appearances, and such as the most penetrating mind could neither have

^f See Hag. ii. 4, &c. Zech. vi. 11, &c. Mal. iii. 1, 2, 3. iv. 1, 2.

foreseen, nor conjectured, much less have described with all their peculiarities, and marked out the several incidents that attended them.

Our blessed Lord foretold his own death, with all its distinguishing circumstances. He foretold the treachery of one disciple, and the cowardice of another. He predicted the persecutions to which his followers would be exposed; the opposition which should be made against the gospel, and its extraordinary and glorious triumph over the power and policy of the world. He foretold the astonishing (and to all human views improbable) fate of the temple of Jerusalem, and the signal destruction of the city. He even foretold the period when this awful event should take place, and described the very ensigns of those arms that were to effect the direful catastrophe. He foretold the various calamities that should befall the Jewish nation, and the total ruin in which their church and state should be involved. All that was predicted was fully, clearly, and literally accomplished. The temple was levelled to the ground; nor could imperial munificence, when exercised with a malignant view to confront the Prophecy of our Lord, renew the structure, or even re-

move the ruins of it, for the erection of another edifice. The Jews were overtaken by the severest inflictions of heaven, and the blood of him whom they had crucified was revenged on their children, and their country; while to this day they remain the signal monuments of the truth of Prophecy; and, having totally lost the *sceptre*, and having no *lawgiver* independently of a foreign tribunal, they afford a visible and standing proof, that *the Shiloh is come, to whom the gathering of the people should be.*

From a revelation thus authenticated by a long and stupendous train of Miracles, which bear the very stamp and seal of omnipotence; and by a striking and connected series of Prophecies, literally and exactly accomplished in the person of its author; Prophecies of events, which the eternal wisdom could alone have foreseen, and the eternal power alone have brought to pass; from a revelation, I say, authenticated by such overpowering evidence, what rational enquirer can withhold his assent? Or where, we may boldly ask, amidst the numerous varieties of religious opinion, which in all ages of the world have influenced the belief and directed the practice of mankind, where shall we find a system that can boast of attestations in any

degree equal or similar to those of the gospel? Let the adversaries of our holy faith point out a religion that bears such visible impressions of an Almighty hand; let them do this, and we are content to renounce our cause, to forego for ever, what we now cannot but assert, the exclusive title of Christianity to the venerable character of truth.

Surely in vain will they seek for such a parallel in all the fictions of Mahometism.

We have already examined the lofty pretensions of the prophet of Arabia: but instead of evidence we have found extravagant and confident assertions; instead of argument we have heard bold and confused declamation. When called upon by his unbelieving countrymen to produce proofs of his mission, and to work some Miracle in attestation of his title to the Prophetic office, in the evasive language of imposture he shrunk from the just and pertinent requisition; and, with a tone of affected dignity, referred them to the supernatural elegance and sublimity of the Koran.

The Redeemer of mankind, in answer to the pious scruples of his friends, or the captious questions of his enemies, with the same majestic simplicity of an upright and elevated mind, appealed to *the Works which he*

wrought in his Father's name; to the sick whom he had healed, the blind who had received their sight, the lepers whom he had cleansed, and the dead whom he had raised to life.

If for a moment we admit, even in its utmost extent, that wildest claim of the impostor to the boasted miracle of the Koran; yet weak and equivocal is the evidence it affords, when compared with those mighty works which dignify and confirm the ministry of Jesus Christ. The reality of this pretended Miracle, and the proof which arises from it, can only be determined at the fallible tribunal of taste and criticism: but the works of Jesus, instead of resting on the precarious ground of imagination, derive their credit from the testimony of the senses, of all depositions the most faithful and unquestionable.

Nor is the inferiority of the religion of Mahomet to that of Christ less striking and obvious with respect to the attestation of Prophecy, than it is with regard to Miracles. But to enter into a regular and formal contrast of the two religions, would in either case be unnecessary, and even impossible. For, amidst all the unsubstantial visions of Mahometism, amidst all the arrogant pretences of

its founder, we are unable to discover any proofs, which can with the least shadow of reason be opposed to the solid and convincing evidence of the gospel.

Allowing, however, *ex hypothesi*, (what never can be granted in reality,) the justice of that extravagant claim of the audacious impostor to certain predictions which once existed in our scriptures; admitting yet further the propriety of the interpretation, by which his infatuated followers still labour to wrest a variety of passages in support of his pretensions; yet even on these suppositions, who can without presumption compare these vague and equivocal testimonies to the pointed and decisive evidence which arises from the vast, the splendid scheme of Christian Prophecy? A scheme, which by its magnificence overpowers the imagination, and of whose grandeur the most exalted description can convey but faint and inadequate ideas.

We behold, with astonishment, a spirit of Prophecy pervading all time; commencing so early as the fall of man, and extending to the final consummation of all things: we see it uniformly characterising one person; first by dark and obscure intimations, then gradually unfolding itself with brighter and

brighter lustre at every step, till the appearance of Him who was its ultimate end and object. In Him and his Apostles, but particularly in his beloved Disciple, we behold it once more renewed, and predicting with peculiar exactness every important event which should befall his church, even from its earliest establishment down to that period of awful expectation, when the great plan of divine grace shall be brought to a glorious and consistent conclusion, and the mysterious counsels of the Almighty, respecting the Christian dispensation, shall be for ever closed in judgment.

SERMON VIII.

LUKE XIX. 22.

Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.

WHEN the Koran, by the revelation of its several chapters, during the long period of more than twenty years, was at last completed, the Arabian prophet may be conceived standing forth to public view, and summoning the contemporary world and all posterity, to hear his unvarying testimony to its certainty and truth. With his volume in his hand he comes forward, and in such terms as these he calls on the living and the unborn to be his judges. “This is the Book of
“ God: it contains his last and most inviola-
“ ble commands; it proceeded immediately
“ from heaven; and was delivered by the
“ mouth of an angel: blessed are the faithful
“ that shall receive its doctrines, and cursed
“ are those that oppose its authority.”

But before we yield up our assent to these unqualified and peremptory demands, we are naturally led to enquire upon what reasons they are founded. The feeble attempt,

that was made to support them by an empty shew of external evidence, has already been sufficiently exposed. We will now proceed to examine, whether this pretended revelation be with greater success attested internally, by the sanctions of natural religion, and the established opinions of mankind.

That we may advance by infallible deductions to the conclusion we shall form concerning the credibility of the Koran, let us take care to build nothing on the perishable ground of present prejudices; nothing on the questionable authority of any prevailing system; nothing on any local and temporary maxims, that may be peculiar to age or country. Let us even exceed the measure of common justice and common candour; and try the Koran by a test contrived by one of its most zealous and successful champions in that age when it was published, and among the people to whom it was first proposed.

When the Caliph Omar, the contemporary and companion of Mahomet, was solicited to spare the celebrated Library of Alexandria, he replied to this effect: “ Either the contents of those books agree with what is written in the holy Koran, or do not agree. If they do agree, then the Koran is suf-

“ ficient, and those books are useless: if they
 “ do not agree, they are pernicious, and must
 “ be destroyed.”

Now, since the religion of Mahomet constantly admits the authority, and appeals to the testimony, of former revelations, the Law and the Gospel; we may, with some limitation, justly avail ourselves of these principles in our enquiry into its truth.

FIRST, if the Koran agrees in historical information and doctrines with prior revelations, without any addition or improvement, it is evidently unnecessary; and, therefore, it seems highly improbable that it should have been revealed.

SECONDLY, if the Koran contains facts or doctrines contrary to those which have been already revealed, it stands self-condemned as an imposture.

If, in examining the Koran by the first of those principles which I have assumed, we exclude so much of it as its author appears to have borrowed from the Jewish and Christian scriptures, it can never be allowed that the little which remains after this deduction is of sufficient consequence or necessity to justify the supposition of an immediate interference of the Deity, by a new and solemn revelation. For when the Almighty Governor

of the universe, whose distinguishing characteristic it is to do nothing in vain, deviates from the ordinary course of his providence, and, in compassion to the weakness and the ignorance of his creatures, graciously condescends to instruct them by a particular revelation of his will; it is natural to expect, that the information contained in such revelation should be, like the manner in which it is conveyed, interesting and extraordinary. To suppose, therefore, that God has thus revealed to mankind what is in itself trifling and unimportant; or what was before equally known to them either by former manifestations of himself, or by the use of their own faculties, is to ascribe to him a conduct in every respect unworthy his wisdom; to suppose him to do what is evidently unnecessary to be done; and thus to act in direct contradiction to every idea which reason and experience teach us to form of his moral government.

Amidst the numerous merits, whether fancied or real, which the enthusiasm of its advocates has ascribed to the Koran, to that of Novelty it has, perhaps, of all others, the least claim. Were it consistent with the decorum of this time and place to enter into so minute a species of investigation, it would

be no difficult task to point out the several sources from whence the impostor derived almost every doctrine, precept, and ceremony, which it prescribes. But, on the present occasion, it will be sufficient to our purpose, to instance in some few of the most important and interesting particulars.

Of the various and incongruous materials which compose the misshapen structure of Mahometan superstition, the far greater and more valuable part may be traced immediately, or ultimately, to the scriptures of truth. To them in particular must we have recourse for the origin of whatever we discover of sublimity in the descriptions, of purity in the doctrines, or of sound morality in the precepts, of the Koran.

If it sometimes surprises us with unusual grandeur, and, quitting the ordinary style, magnificently paints the Almighty sitting on the eternal throne, encompassed with clouds and darkness, and giving laws to the universe; we instantly recognize the hallowed manner, the ideas, and even the language of the Hebrew prophets. When it describes the various attributes of the Deity, whether physical or moral; when it represents him as omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent; as true, and merciful, and just; it conveys no

new, no clearer notions of his incomprehensible essence than we before possessed: it only re-echoes the doctrines, and feebly imitates the expressions, of the inspired penmen of the Old and New Testament. Even that grand and fundamental doctrine of the Unity of the supreme Being, the establishment of which was constantly alleged by the impostor as the primary cause of his pretended mission, contains no novel or unknown truth. It is the leading principle of the religion of nature; and it constituted one of the most important and distinguishing objects of a former revelation. The manifestation and preservation of this momentous truth was one great end, to which the Mosaic institution was ordained to be subservient: and even the Gospel, though it unfolds new scenes to our astonished view, and presents us with a clearer and fuller discovery of the divine nature, by revealing to us the mysterious doctrine of the existence of three distinct Persons in the Godhead; yet it still maintains, and preserves inviolate, the Unity of the supreme Being.

But, possessed only of a rude and imperfect knowledge of the doctrines of the Gospel, and probably deriving that knowledge from its most corrupt and heretical followers,

Mahomet seems to have entertained very gross and mistaken ideas of the Christian Trinity, and to have been totally ignorant of the perfect consistence of that opinion with the Unity of the Deity.

Hence we hear him continually reasoning after this manner—“^a Verily Christ Jesus
“ the son of Mary is the apostle of God, and
“ his word, and a spirit proceeding from him.
“ Believe therefore in God, and his apostles,
“ and say not, there are three Gods. Forbear
“ this; it will be better for you: God is but
“ one God. Far be it from him that he
“ should have a son! Unto him belongeth
“ whatsoever is in heaven and on earth: and
“ God is a sufficient protector. Christ doth
“ not proudly disdain to be the servant of
“ God, neither the Angels who approach
“ near to his presence: and whoso disdaineth
“ his service, and is puffed up with pride,
“ God will gather them all to himself at the
“ last day.”

Hence too we behold almost every page of his pretended revelation marked with the fiercest invectives, and denouncing the severest woes on all who impiously presume to rob the Almighty of the honour due unto his name, by associating other beings with him

^a Sale's Koran, edit. 4to. p. 80.

as his equals, and partakers of his majesty and glory.

Thus the Koran, instead of contributing any thing to the removal of that veil of darkness which conceals the ineffable perfections of the Almighty from the view of short-sighted man ; instead of enlarging our ideas, and extending our knowledge of the divine nature and attributes, tends to obscure and weaken our perceptions of them, and to make void that revelation of himself which God had before vouchsafed to the world.

But if it be thus exceptionable as containing no improvement of former revelations, by conveying clearer or more distinct notions of the Deity ; it is also equally liable to objection with respect to the worship which it prescribes.

It was frequently the triumphant boast of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ had for ever freed mankind from the intolerable burden of ceremonial observances. But the religion of Mahomet renews and perpetuates the slavery, by prescribing to its votaries a ritual still more oppressive, and entangling them again in a yoke of bondage yet more severe than that of the Law. The Mosaic ceremonies, indeed, (however destitute of merit in them-

selves,) were yet, when considered with a reference to the events with which they were connected, strikingly useful and significant.

But arbitrary and unmeaning are the institutions of the prophet of Arabia; institutions, whose highest, and indeed only use, even in the estimation of their most zealous advocates, is that of proving the piety, and exercising the obedience of the faithful. And even those ceremonies which he evidently borrowed from the Jewish Legislator, no longer possessing any relative merit, and being no longer commemorative of past, or typical of future events, cease to be rational and expressive acts of devotion.

But whatever may be the propriety, and whatever the utility of those numerous and irksome observances with which the Mahometan ritual is burthened, scarcely one can be pointed out which is either new, or peculiar to that institution. Besides those which its author prescribed in imitation of the Law of Moses, there are others, which he derived from less pure and venerable sources; from the senseless and unauthorized traditions of the Rabbins, and from the superstitious customs of the barbarous and pagan Arabs.

Of those carnal ordinances, ablutions, and prostrations, with which the follower of Ma-

homet is commanded to approach the great Father of spirits ; and of the rigorous fasts, by which he is directed to mortify his corrupt affections ; the far greater part had been before introduced amongst the essentials of religion, and observed with a scrupulous exactness by the later Jews : and many of them are said to have prevailed even amongst the idolaters of Arabia.

It was a command repeatedly and forcibly impressed on the Israelites by God himself, that they should not, on pain of the most exemplary vengeance, presume to transfer the impious ceremonies of idol-worship into the service of the living God ; or approach the altar of Jehovah with the same sacrifices and rites, wherewith the nations around them served their Gods. But the daring policy of Mahomet adopted, without hesitation, the fanciful and superstitious ceremonies with which his countrymen adored their imaginary deities ; and scrupled not to sanctify them with the authority, and engraft them on the worship of the one true, eternal, and self-subsisting God. Of this kind, amidst a variety of instances too numerous to be recounted in this place, is that great and meritorious act of Mahometan devotion, the pilgrimage to the holy city ; an act which the prophet has

enjoined, and the pious Mussulman implicitly performs, as necessary to the obtaining pardon of his sins, and the qualifying him to be a partaker of the alluring pleasures and exquisite enjoyments of paradise.

Even those parts of the Koran, which are at first view most captivating by the appearance of Novelty, and in which its author seems to have given the reins to a luxuriant imagination, and to have expatiated at large in the boundless regions of fancy, will, upon a closer examination, be found to contain as little of novel, as they do of important information. With respect to the great and momentous doctrine of a future state, and the condition of the soul after its departure from the body, it must indeed be acknowledged, that the prophet of Arabia has presented us with a nearer prospect of the invisible world, and disclosed to us a thousand particulars concerning it, which the holy scriptures had wrapped in the most profound and mysterious silence. But in his various representations of another life, he generally descends to an unnecessary minuteness and particularity, which excites disgust and ridicule, instead of reverence: and even his most animated descriptions of the joys of paradise, or the torments of hell, however strong and glowing the

colours in which they are painted, are yet far inferior in point of true sublimity, and far less calculated to promote the interests of piety by raising the hopes and alarming the fears of rational beings, than that degree of obscurity in which the future life of the gospel is still involved, and those more general terms in which its promises and threatenings are proposed to mankind. Our holy religion, by the resurrection of its great Author, affords an evidence of another life peculiar to itself; an evidence far more conclusive and satisfactory than any which the Koran with all its arrogance can furnish, in support of this interesting and awful truth. It also at the same time reveals to us every thing concerning the mode of our existence in that life, which appears to be in any degree conducive to our comfort and happiness in the present. Admitting, however, that a more particular and circumstantial knowledge of a future state than the Gospel contains was necessary to the well-being of mankind; admitting also, that the Koran has supplied this defect, and communicated this valuable information to the world; yet still we may with propriety deny the necessity of the Mahometan revelation. We know that the impostor constantly pretended to have received these stu-

pendous secrets, by the ministry of an angel, from that eternal book in which the divine decrees have been written by the finger of the Almighty from the foundation of the world : but the learned enquirer will discover a more accessible, and a far more probable source from whence they might be derived, partly in the wild and fanciful opinions of the ancient Arabs, and chiefly in those exhaustless stores of marvellous and improbable fiction, the works of the Rabbins. Hence that romantic fable of the Angel of Death, whose peculiar office it is at the destined hour to dissolve the union betwixt soul and body, and to free the departing spirit from its prison of flesh. Hence that imaginary, yet dreaded Tribunal, before which, when his body is deposited in the grave, the trembling Mussulman, on the authority of his prophet, believes he must appear, to render an exact account of his faith and actions. Hence too the various descriptions of the general Resurrection and final Judgment, with which the Koran every where abounds ; and hence the vast, but ideal Balance, in which the actions of all mankind shall then be impartially weighed, and their eternal doom be assigned them either in the regions of bliss or misery, according as their good or evil

deeds shall be found to preponderate. Here too may be traced the grand and original outlines of that sensual Paradise, and those luxurious enjoyments which were so successfully employed in the Koran to gratify the ardent genius of the Arabs, and allure them to the standard of the prophet. By proceeding in this manner, it might easily be shewn how little there is of novelty or originality in the pretended revelation of Mahomet; but I forbear to trespass on your patience by multiplying unnecessary examples. It is sufficient to repeat what I have before observed, that the Koran does not contain one single doctrine which may not fairly be derived either from the Jewish and Christian scriptures, from the spurious and Apocryphal gospels current in the East, from the Talmudical legends, or from the traditions, customs, and opinions of the Arabians. The same observation which I have applied to the doctrines, may with some few limitations be likewise extended to the precepts, which the Arabian legislator has enjoined. That the Koran, amidst a various and confused heap of ridiculous and even immoral precepts, contains many interesting and instructive lessons of morality, cannot with truth be denied. Of these, however, the merit is to be

ascribed, not to the feeble imitation, but to the great and perfect original from which they were manifestly drawn. Instead of improving on the Christian precepts by a superior degree of refinement; instead of exhibiting a purer and more perfect system of morals than that of the gospel, the prophet of Arabia has miserably debased and weakened even what he has borrowed from that system. Every duty which he enjoins, every precept which he enforces, in imitation of Christ and his Apostles, though it may still command some regard, has yet lost much of its native beauty and majesty, and bears strong and evident marks of the impure and corrupt channel through which it has passed. Thus, if he sometimes, in a tone of authority, summons his followers to the practice of the various duties of charity; if he commands them to give alms, to relieve the distressed, to forgive injuries; yet base and narrow is the principle on which he enforces these amiable virtues, when compared with the more liberal and beneficent spirit of the gospel of Jesus. Instead of exercising a vague and universal charity, the disciple of Mahomet is expressly taught to confine his benevolence to the followers of the prophet; instead of conferring his good offices on those whose faith

shall happen to differ from his own, he is warned against indulging the tender weakness of humanity, he is commanded to wage perpetual war with the guilty race, and to deem it a meritorious act to extirpate these enemies of his God from off the face of the earth.

But if such be the inferiority of the Koran to preceding revelations, (for the same inferiority is observable in every other duty which it enjoins,) it also labours under a disadvantage equally striking with respect to the motives by which those duties are enforced.

Though different be the representation of the joys and miseries of another life, which the Gospel and the Koran propose to their respective followers, yet the commands of both rest ultimately on the same general sanction of future rewards and punishments. But the religion of Christ justly asserts its superiority over every other system, whether true or false, by the peculiar and animating encouragements to obedience which it offers; encouragements alike unknown to the dispensation of Moses, and to the pretended revelation of Mahomet.

Under all the distresses of life, and amidst all the difficulties of his Christian warfare,

the faithful disciple of Christ possesses a resource, of which the Mahometan can form no conception, in the comfortable promise of divine grace to correct his errors, assist his frailties, and invigorate his resolutions.

The pious Mussulman is induced to comply with the various ordinances of his religion, from a respect to the authority, the promises, and the threatenings of his prophet: but, though possessed also of the same incitements even in a much higher degree, the obedience of the Christian is still further secured by those more engaging and endearing motives of love and gratitude to a Redeemer, who died to rescue a guilty world from the double slavery of sin and death.

On the whole, then, the Koran, instead of supporting its arrogant pretence of being the grand close and consummation of the divine revelations; instead of presenting us with any improvement of the Law and the Gospel, appears in fact to be the grossest corruption and perversion of both.

Under these circumstances, to suppose that it proceeded from the wise and benevolent God, would be to suppose a manifest absurdity; to invert the known order and conduct of his providence; and to make the fuller, and more clear, and perfect of the

divine dispensations prior to, and preparatory of, the partial, and obscure, and imperfect.

But in our application of the SECOND Principle, which I have assumed, to the Koran, we shall find charges of a more direct and positive nature to object against it; we shall here remark the plainest, and the boldest contradictions to that law and that gospel, which at the same time it every where proclaims to be divine; and on whose authority it vainly attempts to found its own claim to divinity. With respect to doctrines, various and irreconcilable are the differences which might be pointed out; yet on these, though sufficient at once to confute the pretensions of Mahomet, I at present forbear to insist. They were perhaps intentional, and adopted in order to promote more effectually the plans of interest and ambition which he had concerted.

But the Koran not only speaks a language contrary to the scriptures in the speculative truths and doctrines which it professes to reveal, it also differs materially with regard to facts. A stronger, or more prominent example of what I now assert, cannot be submitted to your consideration, than its audacious denial of that plainest and most im-

portant event in all the history of the gospel, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Hear the words of the great impostor himself on this subject, where speaking of the Jews he says, “They have spoken against Mary a
“grievous calumny; and have said, Verily
“we have slain Christ Jesus the son of
“Mary, the Apostle of God; yet they slew
“him not, neither crucified him, but he was
“represented by one in his likeness: and
“verily they who disagreed concerning him
“were in a doubt as to this matter, and had
“no sure knowledge thereof, but followed
“only an uncertain opinion. They did not
“really kill him; but God took him up unto
“himself: and God is mighty and wise^b.”

Mahomet indeed was not the first to propagate this bold and extravagant falsehood. Even in the earliest age of the church, whilst the blood of Christ had been yet recently shed at Jerusalem, there arose a sect, who with singular effrontery maintained, that he had suffered in appearance only, and not in reality; and that the Jews and officers of Pilate had wasted their ineffectual rage on an airy phantom, who seemed to endure the tortures which they inflicted, and at last to expire on the cross. But the apocryphal

^b Koran, p. 79.

gospel of Barnabas, a work which seems to have been originally forged by heretical Christians, and since interpolated to favour the views of Mahomet and his followers, corresponds more exactly with the representation of the Koran. We are there told, that in the night in which Jesus was betrayed, at the instant when the Jews were about to apprehend him in the garden, he was miraculously carried up into heaven by the ministry of Angels, whilst the traitor Judas, taken suddenly in the snare which himself had laid, was crucified in his likeness and his stead.

But whatever may be the corrupt source from whence the impostor derived so palpable and notorious a falsehood; whatever be the cause which procured its admittance, whether ignorance or design, the argument is still equally conclusive against the veracity of the Koran.

If additional proofs were necessary to refute the impious claim of the Mahometan imposture to a divine original, I might still further observe, that it is not only inconsistent with preceding revelations, but also with itself.

The advocates for the Mahometan cause labour indeed to obviate any objection which may be drawn from these glaring contradic-

tions, by the doctrine of abrogation. God, say they, in pursuance of the great plan of his providence, was pleased to command many things in the holy Koran, which for wise and good reasons he afterwards revoked. But, not to mention the doubts and uncertainty, which must thus have been unavoidably introduced into a revelation, which ought to be perfectly clear and explicit in all that it commands, it is evident, that such a conduct, though well accommodated to the shifting policy of a capricious mortal, is totally incompatible with the eternal wisdom of the immutable God.

Every revelation which professes to come from God should doubtless be suited to our apprehensions of his perfections; but numberless are the instances in which the Koran either commands or permits what is plainly contradictory both to the nature of the Deity, and to that original law of right and wrong which he has universally impressed on mankind. Indeed the general character of its precepts is too strongly marked, for the most inattentive observer to doubt of the origin from whence they flowed. The impure designs which gave birth to the whole system may be traced in almost every subordinate part; even its sublimest descriptions of the

Deity, even its most exalted moral precepts, not infrequently, either terminate in, or are interwoven with, some provision to gratify the inordinate cravings of ambition, or some licence for the indulgence of the corruptest passions of the human heart. It has given a sanction to fornication, and, if any weight be due to the example of its author, it has justified adultery. It has made war and rapine and bloodshed, provided they be exercised against unbelievers, not only meritorious acts, but even essential duties to the good Mussulman; duties, by the performance of which he may secure the constant favour and protection of God and his prophet in this life, and in the next, entitle himself to the boundless joys of paradise.

Thus has the pretended revelation of Mahomet accomplished the great end for which it was designed, by reforming the corruptions which time and the perverseness of human nature had unhappily conspired to introduce into preceding revelations! And thus signally has it improved on the pure and spiritual morality of the gospel!

From the whole then of what has been said, we are justified in concluding, that the Koran, when considered by itself, independently of other revelations, is in every respect

unworthy the God of purity ; and that when taken on its own principle, as grounded on the law and the gospel, it is notoriously and indisputably false.

If now we apply the same reasoning to Christianity, as subsequent to the law of Moses, which we have already applied to the Koran, the contrast will be found highly favourable to our religion.

From a view of the nature and qualities of the Mosaic law, we shall be convinced that it was both partial and temporary. The Jews were a distinct class of people, separated from all nations of the world, and preserved from mixing with them by means of certain rites and ceremonies, which were evidently designed to keep this distinction sacred and inviolable.

They stood single amongst mankind, and bore on them the visible marks of a divine and appropriate designation. The general government of Providence was (if I may so express myself) epitomized in the particular superintendance of the Deity over this distinguished people : it was reduced to a scale more contracted indeed, but more striking. The Jews stood forward to the world as a proof that there is a God that judges the earth ; and that he, whose name alone is Je-

hovah, is the most high over all. They were selected to be the depositaries of those holy records in which the truths of God are revealed, and his precepts are enforced: and they were ordained to be the means of transmitting his name, his worship, his promises, and his predictions to future generations.

But as the Mosaic institution was of a partial nature, so was it of a limited duration. When its design was accomplished, it was of course to cease. It was admirably adapted to answer the ends for which it was appointed: to impress the mind with a strong sense of the divine unity and government; to preserve some of those fundamental truths of natural religion, which were either wholly denied, or grossly corrupted by other nations; to unfold the great designs of providence and grace; and thus gradually to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, and to dispose the human mind for the reception of those doctrines, which it was his peculiar office to reveal to the world.

The great and characteristical difference between the law of Moses and that of Christ seems to be this. The former chiefly respected the prosperity and interests of the present life, and the good order of a particular community, governed by laws peculiar to

itself. The latter principally has in view our spiritual welfare, and the interest of a future and eternal state; founded on the relation in which we all stand to God as his creatures, and governed by precepts and motives suited to our condition as guilty and imperfect, but as rational and accountable beings. The one was narrow and confined in its view; the other large and extensive as the human race: and as the former was instituted for one particular people, so was it limited to a certain duration: but the latter, as it respects all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues; so does it respect all time. It received its origin in some degree from the fall; and it will endure to the final restitution of all things. The law of Moses was composed of ordinances that only suited one purpose: and when that purpose was answered, its obligation was at an end. But the law of Christ comprehends principles which suit every purpose of every rational creature upon earth; and, being adapted to the general interests of mankind, will continue to be obligatory upon those to whom it is revealed, as long as the world endures.

The law of Moses, considered by itself only, was imperfect and defective. Abstracted from the reference which it bore to a

fuller and more spiritual dispensation, it seems to have been unworthy of the wisdom and purity of God. Its institutions were superfluous and trifling. Some of them tended rather to shackle and debase, than to exalt the mind, and to make religion the burthen of necessity, rather than the tribute of the will. Persons of gross and low ideas, who were unwilling or unable to look beyond the letter of the law, contented themselves with an outward performance of outward ceremonies; having washed their bodies, they thought themselves pure from their sins; and having presented their offerings to the priest, flattered themselves with the presumption of having discharged their duty towards God. But though the law was imperfect, when considered by itself; yet if we view it in the connection in which it stands with a fuller and more liberal dispensation, we shall see its relative importance; and shall adore that wisdom, which has so disposed the various parts of the one great plan of providence and grace, as to make them illustrative of the truth, and subservient to the uses of each other.

It is evident that the law of Moses in its various institutions had a reference to some future dispensation; and that from the ob-

ject to which they pointed, they derived all their consequence and utility. Ablutions of the body were a significant and religious exercise, when they were performed with an eye to the sanctification of the heart, and the purifying the affections from natural or acquired pollutions. Sacrifices and offerings were useful and instructive rites, when considered as evidences of the divine displeasure against sin; and as bearing a reference to the sacrifice of the Messiah, *who, as the prophet Isaiah declares, was to be cut off, but not for himself.* In him, and the great Atonement made by the offering up of his own body on the cross, all the sacrifices of the law received their completion. It was his death that most clearly illustrated their design; and as it explained their nature, it at the same time abolished their use.

The repetition of sacrifices was a strong and decisive proof of their imperfection. The apostle reasons on this subject with great force and accuracy in the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The law, he observes, being only typical of a future dispensation, could have no efficacy by itself. It had no absolute virtue; no independent merit. *It could never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year*

continually, make the comers thereunto perfect.

But the comparative imperfection of the law of Moses will appear more fully from the weakness of its motives, when opposed to those of the gospel. The promise of mercy to pardon, and grace to assist, was not so full and explicit, as it was under the more benign dispensation of the Lord Jesus : *for the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.* Religion is generally characterized in the Old Testament under the denomination of the fear of God ; and I apprehend the reason to be this : The Jews were accustomed to very awful representations of the Deity ; and, living under the discipline of a *school-master*, (as the apostle calls the law,) fear prevailed beyond every other principle in their religious services. Objects were darkened in coming to them through the veil of types and figures, the meaning of which was but very gradually disclosed even to the prophets themselves : and that too, only in proportion to their nearer approach to the fullness of time, when their ultimate purpose was to be more illustriously displayed in their fulfilment by Christ. Obscurity always creates dread : and when the divine Being was seen only through the terrible majesty of the

law, his attributes rather excited awful veneration than filial confidence. But when God was manifested in the flesh, we beheld the glory of his person in the face of his only begotten Son; and we beheld it full of grace and truth.

The motives which enforced obedience on the Jews were always adapted to their knowledge. As the discoveries of truth opened on their minds, so were the privileges which were connected with them proportionably unfolded. Nevertheless, in the most enlightened periods of the Jewish church, we find but very few and very feeble traces of those sublime and endearing motives, by which Christianity is adorned and recommended.

The law of Moses was wholly enforced by temporal sanctions; not that a future state was unknown to the Jews; they had some faint idea, some obscure conceptions of it: but Moses, depending on a particular providence to accomplish either what he had promised, or what he had threatened, omitted to place the doctrine of a future state among the direct and positive sanctions of his law. The *gospel*, on the contrary, *has brought life and immortality to light*. It has dispersed all those shades, which so hung

over it as to render it to the eye of unassisted reason a subject of doubtful speculation, rather than of cheerful hope ; and has placed it in a point of view, unknown even to the favoured people of God under the law. It has reduced to a certainty what nature, at the farthest stretch of its powers, could barely regard as a conjecture ; and demonstrated as a fact, what the Jews were only permitted to behold, through the obscure medium of types and figures, as a distant probability. The clear discovery of a future state, and the application of it as one of the great sanctions of religion, were reserved for the gospel. Hence we are taught to regard man in a higher and nobler light, than nature, with all her boasted attributes and most splendid accomplishments, can represent him. We are taught to consider him as the heir of immortality ; as made for two worlds ; and as qualified to act in both, with increasing capacities both of moral improvement, and of physical happiness.

From these particulars it seems clearly to follow, that the gospel, so far from being superfluous, was in every view highly expedient. The world stood in need of it, as a system calculated to give general information, and diffuse general happiness : and to

the Jews in particular it was necessary, as the consummation of their law in all the great purposes of its institution; and as supplying its defects by the doctrines it revealed, by the assurances it afforded of present grace, and by the encouragements it held forth to the attainment of future and eternal glory.

If we apply the SECOND Rule, we shall easily perceive, that the gospel is in no respect contrary to the law; but that the New Testament is truly, what it professes to be, the end and accomplishment of the Old.

The word law is, in the holy scriptures, used in a variety of senses. In the Old Testament, and also in the writings of St. Paul, it frequently denotes the ceremonies of the law of Moses, which distinguished the Jewish religion and the Jewish people from all others. Sometimes it means the moral law; and expresses particularly that system of precepts relating to our religious and moral conduct, which mark the bounds of our duty to God and man.

The former was abolished, when Jesus came to unite both Jew and Gentile under one comprehensive and gracious dispensation; the latter still continues in its original

force ; for it had not its foundation in any partial or occasional reasons, which only apply to a particular community, and are only ordained to answer a particular and temporary design : on the contrary, it is closely connected with the primitive laws of nature, and the unalterable constitution of things : it has its foundation in causes which can never cease to operate on rational beings, and which are universal and perpetual. Be it, however, observed, that *Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.* He did not destroy even the ceremonial law, till he had so fulfilled the design of its institution, as to render it totally unnecessary. When its end was answered, it of course vanished away. The substance being come, the shadow was useless. But the abrogation of the ceremonial law did not imply any contradiction to its design, nor did it throw the slightest reflection on the wisdom of that God who instituted it. It was only a declaration that the law had answered every purpose, for which it was appointed ; and that its obligation ceased, when the reason of its establishment was at an end. Our blessed Lord most strictly conformed to it, in order to shew his perfect approbation of it.

In him it was complete ; and with him it ceased for ever.

But with respect to the moral law, it was the great business of our Saviour's ministry to illustrate and confirm it. He added no precept that opposed it. He only cleared it from false glosses, and enforced it by stronger motives. Hence the apostle argues, *Do we make void the law by faith? God forbid—Yea, we establish the law.* Every moral precept is as obligatory now as it ever was : and Christians have in this respect the same rule to walk by as the Jews had. Thus *the law of the Lord is perfect, and his commandments endure throughout all generations.* It is the original law written on the heart. It was rendered explicit by the law of the Decalogue : and the law of the gospel brings it forward with additional evidence and force. The grand truths of the gospel were revealed, though obscurely, in the earliest periods of the world : for the same God was the author of every dispensation of true religion ; and he made the one so preparatory to the other, that the whole might be one uniform and consistent plan, worthy of his unerring wisdom, and entitled at once to our grateful acceptance and rational approbation.

God promised our first parents, that *the*

seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. He promised the patriarch Abraham, that *in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed.* The manner of this divine dispensation has been different in different periods: but the same spirit breathes in all; and in all the same object is pursued, recovery from the guilt and misery of sin, through the mercy of God displayed in a Mediator.

This is the basis of the evangelical covenant: and this glorious doctrine is coæval with revelation. Before the publication of the law, the knowledge of this doctrine was, indeed, very confined and obscure; but still there are traces of it in the earliest revelations: and the patriarchs had undoubtedly such impressions of it on their minds, as laid a foundation for that faith, in consequence of which their names are recorded with such honour in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Under the law the great truths of the gospel, which were amply to be revealed in future times, were shadowed forth in sacrificial rites, and other expressive ceremonies, well adapted to answer the purposes of a preparatory institution.

Yet the law of Moses, considered in a separate view, made no provision for the future

pardon of moral guilt ; and afforded no promise or hope of future happiness. But though the covenant made with Moses for one particular people, and for a determined period of time, contained no gracious promises of forgiveness in another life, yet the patriarchs and holy men of old were not destitute of such hopes. From whence could those hopes arise? From whence, but from that more general covenant of grace, published to Adam immediately after his fall, renewed with Noah, with Abraham, with David : the covenant which from them was delivered down to future generations by uninterrupted tradition ; attested by the concurrent evidence of the prophets ; typified by all the sacrifices throughout the world ; and particularly amongst the Jews : and, in the fulness of time, completely and finally established by the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the great Mediator of this covenant ; who fulfilled on our account all its conditions ; died to seal its promises with his blood ; rose again to demonstrate the efficacy of his sacrifice ; and ever liveth to make intercession for us?

If I were to pursue this subject farther, I might shew you the perfect coincidence of the Old Testament with the New : but I have no time for a discussion so comprehen-

sive. It is sufficient to observe, that the gospel does not run counter to the law, so far as to render the one inconsistent with the other. Each was brought forward in its natural order, and each is linked with the other in the most perfect agreement. The ceremonial law, though vacated by the gospel, yet was not abolished till its own purposes were fully answered. The moral duties of the law are enforced with additional sanctions, and illustrated with additional evidence. Its doctrines are confirmed, and explained in their full latitude: what was obscure, is made clear; and what was foretold, has been accomplished. From the whole then we infer, that there is no inconsistency between the two dispensations. They coalesce with each other, as parts of the same system; and, with an exact conformity to all the designs of Providence in the natural and the moral world, the more obscure and partial are preparatory to the more perfect and illustrious.

If we contemplate the gospel by itself, and view it in its own light, we shall have abundant reason to admire it, both for the purity of its nature, and the tendency which it has to promote the interests and happiness of mankind. It bears on it the stamp of a di-

vine original ; and there is a spirit which animates and beautifies it, that must strongly prepossess the pious mind in its favour.

The purity of the gospel is indeed a decisive evidence of the origin whence it proceeded : it is an evidence ever present ; ever legible ; and which no distance, whether of time or place, can efface. That purity is such, as we should naturally expect from the sentiments which uncorrupted nature leads us to form of the divine Being. If he had not already vouchsafed to grant us a revelation of his will, with respect to our duty both to him and to one another ; yet, if we had reason to expect that he would grant it, the clearest dictates of our judgment, and the noblest sentiments of our heart, would lead us to anticipate the same display of benevolence on the part of God, and the same encouragements to virtue among men, which we now find in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As it is pure, so it is perfect. Whatever is necessary for us to know, is discovered by it ; and discovered too in such a manner, as to answer all the purposes of a revelation designed for general information. Speculations to exercise the ingenuity and wit of men are by no means essentially connected with the

great business of immortality. A man may be acquainted with them, and not be the better; or ignorant of them, and not be the worse. But in the gospel we have nothing superfluous, and nothing perplexing. Every declaration of sin and duty; every promise to engage us to pursue the one, and every threatening to deter us from the other, are brought forward with a precision and simplicity, which leave no room either for the perverse to cavil, or the impartial to mistake. There is no vice, which it does not detect, even within the darkest retreats of the mind. There is no duty, connected with the glory of God, the welfare of our neighbour, or the true happiness of ourselves, but what it unfolds and illustrates.

Its precepts are not only clear in their mode of delivery, and beneficial in their tendency; but they are enforced by every motive that is calculated to affect the heart, and to exalt and purify its affections. The promise of divine forgiveness and compassion through Jesus, and of help and succour through the divine spirit, are of the most soothing and engaging nature to beings encompassed with difficulties of various kinds; and exposed to moral weaknesses and transgressions, which are degrading to our nature,

and destructive of our happiness. But, to inspire us with the full soul of virtue and religion, it carries our aspiring minds beyond the contracted views of this mortal scene, to that exalted world of spirits, where we shall be for ever advancing in knowledge and perfection, where every offence sincerely repented of shall be pardoned, and every virtuous endeavour accepted and rewarded, by him who is our most compassionate Father, as well as our most righteous Judge,

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SERMON IX.

MATT. vii. 16.

Ye shall know them by their fruits.

THE characters of the religions which Christ and Mahomet have respectively founded are not more different than those of the nations which have embraced them. From the period of their primary establishment to the present hour, a different aspect seems to have belonged to them. Wherever they have spread themselves, they have communicated their distinguishing properties to the understandings and affections of the people whom they have converted; and, in opposition to former experience, the influences of climate, of government, and of manners, have yielded to the effects of religious persuasion. The appearances they now give to those great divisions of mankind among which they are planted, form a most striking part of the modern history of the world: and the investigation of the causes which produce those appearances, would constitute one of the most

splendid subjects of political speculation, even though it were not at the same time one of the most important to the interests of Christianity.

The view of mankind, as arranged under this distinction of religious opinion, presents to us very singular and permanent oppositions of national character.

The faith of Mahomet, wherever it is established, is united with despotic power. On the banks of the Ganges, and on the shores of the Caspian, under the influence of climates the most unlike, and manners the most opposite, it is still found accompanied with servitude and subjection: every free and every gallant people, whom it has involved in the progress of its power, have abandoned their rights when they enlisted themselves under the banner of the prophet, and have forgotten in the title of the faithful the pride of independence, and the security of freedom.

The religion of Christ, on the contrary, is found to exist and to flourish under every variety of political power. In the different periods of its history it has been united with every form of government: and of the nations among whom it is now professed, the most general, and perhaps the most discrimi-

nating feature is that equal and courteous system of manners, which has operated in so striking a manner to limit the progress of tyranny; and which, even in the few countries where despotism is established, has served to soften the austerity of its administration.

The nations who have embraced Mahometism are distinguished by a spirit of hostility and hatred to the rest of mankind. Wherever it has established itself, the relations of situation, of language, and of national policy, have been controlled by the influence of religious enmity. The regulations which it prescribes for the conduct of private life have a tendency to separate the Mussulman from all communion with other men, and all participation of the offices of humanity: and in every period of its history the pride, or the jealousy, which it has inspired, seems to have represented the rest of mankind as enemies, with whom, while they opposed the prophet's power, it were impious to converse, and whom it was even meritorious to destroy.

The character of Christian nations is, on the contrary, marked by a spirit of benevolence and humanity, as new in the history of mankind, as it is conducive to their welfare.

The violence of national animosity, of old so fruitful a source of dissension, has given way in a great measure to the dictates of more enlarged humanity. Where the religion of Christ has not always directed the conduct of men, it has at least secretly influenced their opinions; and the union of European nations in the faith of the Gospel has produced a general disposition to courtesy and humanity, which, in opposition to every distinction of language, of manners, and of national interests, has united the various people, of whom it is composed, in one firm and sacred bond of brotherhood and affection.

Of the nations who have embraced Mahometism, another feature equally conspicuous is a degree of ignorance strangely inconsistent with that instinctive emulation, which the improvement of neighbouring states usually excites in the vanity of individuals or the policy of governors. Their progress in science, their capacity to invent, and even their willingness to adopt any useful or elegant arts, bear no proportion to their zeal and activity in the support of their religious tenets. Throughout every country where Mahometism is professed, the same deep pause is made in philosophy; and the same wide

chasm is to be seen between the opportunities of men to improve, and their actual improvement.

Every hearer whose mind has ever glowed with the love of learning, or melted with the feelings of humanity, must recoil with horror from the savage and brutal barbarity of those Caliphs, who, not content with discouraging a spirit of enquiry among their subjects, effaced every vestige of the knowledge attained by former ages, and waged unnatural war against the mind, as well as the arms of their species. The success of their efforts is as much to be deplored, as the motives of them are to be detested. For, as prejudice took deep root, and ignorance had spread through a wider extent, we have seen those maladies verified in Mahometan countries, which Tacitus so forcibly describes, while impending over his own. “—^a Ut corpora
“ lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur; sic in-
“ genia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam
“ revocaveris. Subit quippe etiam ipsius
“ inertiae dulcedo: et invisæ primo desidia,
“ postremo amatur.”

Such is precisely the state of the intellectual world among the followers of Mahomet: knowledge is not only neglected, but de-

^a Præfat. in Vit. Agric.

spised ; not only the materials of it are banished, but the very desire of recovering and applying them is totally extinguished. Hence the bold sallies of invention are checked, the patient efforts of industry are unknown ; and they who contribute not by their own discoveries to the common stock, are at the same time too perverse to adopt, and too proud to revere, what has been discovered by other men. The evil is, indeed, hopeless, when the remedy itself is rejected with loathing and contempt : for how can the Mahometans emerge from that ignorance, which they are accustomed to consider as meritorious ? What power of reason will be sufficient to break the magic spell which now holds them in bondage to the tyranny of the despot, the policy of the priest, and the bigotry of the vulgar ?

If the character of Christian nations, on the contrary, were to be portrayed, the feature perhaps the most distinguishing in it would be that intelligence which seems in general to pervade them. The spirit of science, indeed, appears to rest solely with them. Though buried for a time in the ignorance with which Europe was overspread by the irruptions of the barbarous nations ; though long oppressed by the violence of

ecclesiastical power, and the grossness of early superstition, its flame was not altogether destroyed. It burnt in secret at least, even in the recesses of monastic retirement; and though too feeble of itself to dispel the gloom that surrounded it, yet was it preserved from total extinction, amidst the chimerical conceits of the fanatic, and the frivolous contentions of the recluse. Re-kindling at last in an age, in which the human mind seemed to emerge from the darkness in which it was involved, in which the spirit of liberty gave dignity and vigour to its exertions, and which the bounty of Providence distinguished by discoveries the most salutary to the human race, it soon attained its former lustre: and no longer confined, as in earlier ages, to the opulent or the powerful, it now began to spread its equal light over the mass of human kind, and to illuminate those venerable forms of truth, of religion, and of freedom, which before were hidden from every vulgar eye.

Of the reformation, indeed, it may be said, without the extravagance of partiality, or the declamation of panegyric, that no event, which either history has recorded, or philosophy investigated, has been attended with so extensive and auspicious a change in pri-

vate and public life, in the government of nations and in the manners of individuals, in the sentiments of the higher ranks and the habits of the lower, in the cultivation of every polite attainment which adorns the mind, and the yet greater improvement of every profound science which invigorates and enlarges it. The progression of knowledge has been constant in every country where it began ; the spirit of enquiry has, in every age, communicated itself to surrounding nations ; and while our proficiency is such as to justify us in boasting of discoveries, to some of which former generations never reached, and to others of which they never aspired, we have the consolation to reflect, that a wide and unexplored field still lies open for the most unwearied endeavours and the brightest talents : that our own success has indeed been so rapid as to animate their emulation, and yet that our progress is hitherto so imperfect, as to facilitate, not to preclude, their most vigorous exertions. In a word, from this eventful period the spirit of science has been hastening towards perfection. In every country distinguished by the Christian name, its influence has been felt, and its emulation has been known. And when we review mankind as

inhabitants of the same globe, and mark the revolutions by which as men, or as nations, they are distinguished, the character of Christian may be determined by the superior degree of intelligence which accompanies and adorns it.

Such is the extreme diversity of character to be found among the nations who have embraced Mahometism and Christianity; and such the appearance which these great divisions of mankind assume under this distinction of religious opinions. In the East, under the influence of Mahometan belief, the human mind appears to have lost somewhat of its capacity and power; the natural progress of mankind, whether in government, in manners, or in science, has been retarded by some secret principle of private indolence or external control; and over the various nations who have either assented to the faith, or submitted to the arms, of the impostor, some universal but baleful influence seems to have operated, so as to counteract every diversity of national character, and restrain every principle of national exertion. In the West, under the happy auspices of Christianity, men appear to have attained a vigour in their intellectual exertions, an extent in their intellectual pursuits, and a success in

their intellectual cultivation, utterly unknown in any former period of their history. Their pursuits, whether in science, or in art, have been guided by a bolder spirit, and rewarded with more illustrious success, than in any former age of speculation. The boundaries which before seem to have been imposed to the exertions of the human mind, and to have limited not only the progress of genius, but even the prospects of literary ambition, have been extended or removed.

The regular motions and comparative magnitudes of the celestial bodies, the simple but wonderful laws by which the material world is regulated ; the inconsiderable proportion which the earthly and solar systems bear to the vast and glorious works of omnipotence, hold a distinguished rank in the superiority of modern over ancient philosophy. The origin and combination of our ideas, the distinct offices and mutual connections of our mental faculties, the primary and unalterable foundations of morality, and the dependence of its various modes on collateral and adventitious circumstances, have been investigated with unwearied diligence, and explained with the nicest precision. To these abstruse and yet sublime speculations, we may add the discovery of printing; an event more in-

teresting, perhaps, than any other inventions, however profound be their principles, and however extensive their application: for by this discovery knowledge is spread through a wide extent, every useful or ingenious effort of the understanding is preserved as a model for imitation, or an incentive to improvement. Above all, an impregnable barrier seems to be fixed against the return of general ignorance and barbarism, and those dreadful revolutions which have sometimes swept away the labours of former ages, and plunged even enlightened nations into sudden and hopeless darkness.

But the researches of Christian nations have not been confined only to those topics which merely exercise curiosity, or excite admiration; on the contrary, utility has been united with truth, as well in the studies of the few, as in the experience of the many. To the affairs of men, as well as to the abstractions of philosophy, the spirit of science has among ourselves been applied; the principles of government and the rights of men have been ascertained; the limits of power and obedience have been defined; and the rights of nations, no longer reposed upon the insecure foundation of habit or opinion, have under the influence of philosophy acquired

the clearness of demonstration, and the firmness of principle. Since the æra of their improvement, the nations of Christianity have emulated each other in their progress towards refinement. The most honourable triumphs, and the most favourite subjects of congratulation, have been those of learning and science; and the glory most ardently coveted and most readily bestowed, has been that of disseminating truth and knowledge amongst mankind. Every succeeding age has marked the increase of their acquisitions and the extension of their views. The flame of science, when once kindled, has pervaded every description of men, among whom Christianity has been known; and nations, who were once severed from the knowledge of the world by the ignorance and barbarity in which they were involved, have now risen into distinction, and assumed their place among the enlightened divisions of mankind.

Through the whole scheme of his moral government the Deity has connected by secret ties the future and present interests of men; and consequently has made the efforts of human wisdom the instruments of a wider and more vigorous efficacy to his own extraordinary interpositions.

In various degrees, indeed, and under various circumstances, the vices and the virtues, the ignorance and the knowledge of men are subservient to his unsearchable purposes. They form a part of one great and solid chain, which our reason cannot measure ; and long after their efficacy seems to be exhausted, we are led to trace their necessary connection with events very remote in time, and very dissimilar in kind. When the gospel was introduced into the world, the dispensations of heaven were most of them supernatural ; and, consistently with the mode of procedure at this juncture, *the foolish things of the world were appointed to confound the wise.* But the propriety of this appointment is evinced, and its very success confirmed, by a subsequent state of things, in which extraordinary measures are no longer requisite : and thus with a consistence which marks every successive stage of God's designs, as they gradually unfold themselves to our view, the gospel was left to be established and disseminated by those moral causes, by which the visible course of things is regulated. We therefore not only admit that the Deity does, but we infer, from every known principle of moral fitness, that he would support the gospel ; and draw out the full ef-

fects which it is capable of producing, by the aid of secondary and human means, by learning, by civilization, and government, to the improvement of which the gospel itself has indirectly contributed.

From these observations we may see the consummate propriety of those different means, which God employs in different situations of things to carry on the same general design, sometimes using preternatural and sometimes natural means, sometimes working by the weakness of man, and sometimes by his strength ; and always acting for the noblest ends, by means the most proper.

Every new religion must be supposed to counteract the reigning prejudices and vices of the times ; and consequently no objection arises against its credibility, from the evils to which it for a time exposes those persons who have the honesty to profess, and the courage to diffuse it. But when the same religion is once established, a species of proof is required, the very reverse of that which was before necessary.

On the first appearance of the gospel, we find the evidence of it in the patience of those who encountered every temporal evil for its sake. During the continuance of that gospel in the world at large, we obtain other

evidences of its divine original, by the share it has in promoting the temporal good of those who profess it.

When therefore any religion is, as it were, incorporated with the ordinary providence of God in his moral government, the credibility of it may in a great measure be determined by its actual and visible influence on the welfare of mankind. Though ultimately directed to higher ends, it is still relative to the constitution and circumstances of man; and as its best evidence must arise from the conformity it has to the attributes of the Deity, it is difficult to conceive how any religion can be supposed to derive its origin from him, which is hostile to the temporal happiness of those to whom it is given. The being whom it is the object of his gracious will to bless in a future existence, it seems not consistent with his wisdom to oppress or deceive in the present. Much therefore would those doctrines want of their best evidence, which, while they pretended to minister to the future welfare of mankind, were instrumental, now, only in their degradation or their ruin.

Whether in the nature of the Mahometan and Christian religions there be any permanent causes of this diversity in their effects,

affords a subject of very important and serious investigation : and if it can be shewn, that the one is naturally destructive of the great principles of human welfare, and the other as naturally conducive to them, it is to be presumed that no mean confirmation will thus arise of their respective falsehood and truth.

The immediate end of religion is to prepare mankind for a future state ; but in the prosecution of this end, there is a collateral effect, which it unavoidably has upon the temporal character of man. The doctrines which it teaches, and the precepts which it prescribes, while they are relative to the division of his **INTELLECTUAL** and **MORAL** Powers, affect also their nature and extent : hence that religion will most effectually conduce to the welfare of man, which most invigorates and enlarges these capacities of his mind.

FIRST. The influence of religious persuasion must always be great either in improving, or contracting, the Faculties of the Understanding. Opinions which are the first received and the last parted with, which are united with all the hopes and all the fears of humanity ; which among the great mass of mankind are seldom doubted of, and seldom

are corrected ; cannot be supposed to be indifferent in their effects upon the mind. The understanding is equally subject to habits with our other powers ; and according to the manner in which it has been exercised, or to the reach and extent which it has acquired in its common exercises, will be its exertion and character in every other employment. The votary of a weak or narrow superstition, which exhibits its Gods in the shape, and endows them with the passions, of mankind ; he whose mind has been accustomed to no higher forms of excellence, and to no brighter objects of contemplation, than the doctrines which such a religion affords, cannot easily be imagined to possess an understanding much elevated or improved ; and will not carry to other employments that liberal and enlightened spirit which rational speculations excite and confirm. So far as the influence of its truths upon his understanding extends, his religion will tend to contract it ; the difficulties which oppose its progress will be so far increased, as its former habits have blinded or weakened it ; and, amidst this general depression, it can only resume its powers, when some unusual and important concern calls them forth, and leads them beyond the limits which had

been formerly imposed to them. A religion, on the contrary, which exhibits sublime objects of contemplation ; which arrays its Deity in every possible excellence ; and which mingles none of the infirmities of man with the perfections of heaven ; may naturally be supposed to improve and to exalt the human understanding. By giving it in its common and permanent employments an object of transcendental excellence and magnitude, by accustoming it to high ideas of wisdom and perfection, it must even insensibly have an influence in stamping a similar character on all its exertions ; and while to the mind and views of the philosopher it affords a portion of the same sublimity and spirit, to the common habits of opinion also it communicates somewhat of the same extent, and marks with bolder features the general character.

But the great influence of religious opinion upon the powers of the human understanding arises from the information which it gives to man of his nature and end. All excellence is relative to the situation in which it is shewn ; and, before any kind of ambition can be excited, it is first necessary to know what it is that ambition can attain.

In the ordinary business of life the exer-

tions of mankind are proportioned to the probability of success. No greater industry is exerted, and no greater variety of intelligence acquired, than what seems necessary for the station in which it is probably to be brought into use. The differences of fortune and condition thus in a very obvious manner affect the capacities or acquisitions of the mind. The possessor of rank and opulence, who is raised by fortune to the higher conditions and the greater duties of life, feels himself called upon for wider views and more liberal accomplishments than the generality of mankind: and if he possesses the common ambition of his station, he will proportion his efforts to the opportunities which are offered to him, and to the expectations which are formed of him. The poor man, on the contrary, concerning whom no such expectations are entertained, and whose life is probably to be passed in domestic duties and corporeal labour, as naturally accommodates his mind to the situation in which he is to act; and seldom is solicitous about any acquisitions either of knowledge or of virtue, which are not demanded by his condition: and thus the inequalities of rank and of fortune, which are produced by the improvements of society, have a natural and

obvious tendency either to exalt or to depress the capacities of their possessors, and to adapt all their exertions to the situation in which they are to be employed. It is in the same manner that religion operates on the mind of man. From religion only he learns what are the final views and expectations of his being ; for what purpose his mental powers were given ; to what ends they lead ; and what higher degrees of excellence they may yet receive. He will, therefore, be led to accommodate his ambition and his desires to the sense he possesses of his nature. The consciousness of greater capacity for virtue will be attended with a stronger sense of obligation to become virtuous.

To the poor native of unenlightened countries, what motives can his religion afford to excite the ardour or the activity of his mind? The service of Deities little elevated above the rank of man cannot much improve his opinion of the consequence of his being, or animate his desire of their favour ; and a long Futurity to be passed in the same occupations which now engage him, or in the narrow circle of animal enjoyment, cannot produce in him any higher conceptions of the dignity of his nature, or animate him to the exertion of any other powers, than those

that are to be employed in the life for which he thinks himself destined. Little raised in his pursuits above animal life, he will have something contracted and abject in all his hopes. He sees before him an indistinct prospect of happiness in corporeal indulgence, or indolent repose: he therefore is prompted by instinct, and directed even by reason, to accommodate himself to this destiny of his nature; and he thinks it folly and delusion to disquiet himself about any higher pursuits than those in which Eternity seems to be engaged. No views of mental improvement have ever dawned upon his mind; and he leaves the world, as he entered it, ignorant of all the nobler capacities of his nature, and uninstructed in the dignity of his being by those religious encouragements and assistances, which alone could instruct him.

How different is the influence of enlightened religion! Taught by this, man becomes acquainted with the character of his being. Regarding himself no longer as the grovelling inhabitant of earth, he extends his hopes beyond the reach of animal enjoyment. He finds himself destined to immortal life; he feels himself endued with the capacity of eternal happiness. To this sublime end his mind almost involuntarily endeavours to fit

itself. His imagination, his understanding, his heart, assume new energy and extent, as they are employed on so boundless a scene. And while he looks forward to those bright prospects which religion unfolds to his view, sentiments of conscious dignity insinuate themselves into his mind, so as to purify his taste, and exalt his desires above the gross and fleeting pleasures of this terrestrial state.

It requires no uncommon effort of sagacity to discover the wide difference that subsists between the religions of Mahomet and Christ in their influence on the conceptions of the imagination, and the direction of the appetites. The doctrines, which the prophet of Arabia has taught concerning the divine perfections, too frequently accord with the lowest ideas of the human mind; and though they are at times illuminated by sublime or magnificent images, yet many of the supposed beauties of the Koran consist rather in the brilliancy of the language than in the majesty of the thought. How much Mahomet was indebted to the writings of the Prophets and of the Evangelists, for the greater part of what is sublime or beautiful in his theology, his compositions declare: but with this sacred and hallowed imagery he blended the impure superstitions and gross

conceptions of his countrymen. For the wild profusion and incongruous mixture of absurdity and sense which pervade his writings, it is scarcely possible to account on any other supposition than the natural incapacity even of the wisest man to form upon every subject, and to preserve upon every occasion, just and consistent notions of the divine perfections.

In what glowing colours is the greatness of the Deity displayed almost in the commencement of the Koran! And with what zeal does the imagination go along with descriptions, which seem so suited to the supreme dignity of his nature, and the glorious excellence of his works! Yet hardly is this enthusiasm excited, before all the ardours of the mind are repressed, when we find this sublime Being descend to the meanest and most contemptible employments; prescribing laws which minister more to the appetites than to the interests of men; and regulating with the same care at one moment the order of secret and impure enjoyment, and in the next the discipline in which men are to be trained for eternity.

In the composition of the fanatical impostor credulity is often intermixed with craft. The fervours, which are at first assumed vo-

luntarily and insidiously, return by a kind of mechanical force: in process of time the glow of his fancy and the tumult of his passions are no longer artificial, but real: and in this last stage of depravity combined with folly, the enthusiast is inseparably blended with the hypocrite in the whole mass of character; and in the same action we may discover the wiliness of the one, and the weakness of the other. Hence the inconsistencies of Mahomet are to be ascribed, partly to cunning, in accommodating his doctrines to the prejudices of other men, and partly to fanaticism, which prevented him from controlling the impetuous but uncertain sallies of his own mind.

Hence the God of Abraham and of Moses, the incomprehensible Being, who, in the language of Isaiah, *liveth from eternity to eternity*, is associated with the gross and limited attributes of Eastern idolatry; and the altar which is erected to the Father of universal nature, is commanded to be approached with the slavish rites of a timorous and abject superstition.

Of that Eternity, the representation of which forms so great a part of every religion, the ideas which Mahomet has given are not more pure or more consistent. Of such a

system of opinions, so perplexed by inconsistency, and so debased by impurity, the effect upon the mind is obvious. Though all men probably can feel the sublimity of those descriptions which sometimes occur, yet the impression is momentary: but the apprehensions which are entertained of the Deity from his agency, and the conceptions which are formed of Futurity from its employments, are permanent. The beauties of the Koran may captivate the fancy; but its errors at once delude the judgment, degrade the spirit, and pollute the affections. How can the follower of Mahomet, therefore, feel any enlargement given to his understanding from representations of a Deity, who, though sometimes eloquently or magnificently described, is yet familiarized to his apprehension in the character of an impure or capricious being? How can he be excited to the exercise or improvement of the higher powers of his nature, by the views which his religion affords him of a Futurity in which these powers seem to be unemployed; in which the enjoyments of animal pleasure form a great part of the reward assigned to virtue; and to the relish of which no other preparation seems necessary, than to assim-

late the mind to an ambition as limited, and to desires as impure?

Though the existence of a Deity has been admitted as well in the darkest as the most enlightened ages; and though it is equally supported by the testimony of tradition and the authority of reason; yet the ideas entertained of his attributes have been much diversified by various causes in the constitution of men's minds, or in the circumstances of their situation. The Northern nations, fierce and unpolished in their manners, assailed by the severities of an inclement sky, and habituated to the contemplation of dreary wastes or rugged mountains, have arrayed their deities in every terrible quality. Among the inhabitants of the East, whose tempers seem to be cast in a softer mould, and whose senses are accustomed to more delicate and more beautiful prospects of nature, the characters of their Gods wear a lovelier aspect. The same propensity in the worshipper to assimilate the object of his worship to his own ruling passions, or his own favourite tenets, may be traced through individuals and sects. The God of the benevolent man is, in his contemplation, surrounded with the mild lustre of benevolence: the God of the malig-

nant is seen only with frowns of displeasure, and armed with the thunderbolt of vengeance. In the Deity of Zeno we perceive much of the sullen dignity and harsh inflexibility, in which the philosopher himself placed the supreme good; and upon the same principles Epicurus ascribed to his Gods that exemption from the solicitude of care, and the bustle of activity, which he represented as essential to happiness, both human and divine. But in the God whom Christians are commanded to adore, none of those imperfections can be discerned, which are usually and justly imputed to the peculiar sentiments of individuals, or the general habits of nations. Without the jargon of science, and without the rant of enthusiasm, he is presented to us with all the perfections which were ever assigned to the divinity, by the reason of the contemplative philosopher, or the fancy of the enraptured poet.

And here it well deserves our notice, that while the human understanding has been chiefly employed in investigating the *absolute* existence of God's attributes, divine revelation usually exhibits them in a *relative*, and therefore a more intelligible and more interesting point of view. He is our Father, by whom we are protected; he is our Counsel-

lor, by whom we are instructed in the duties of our station; he is our Judge, by whom we shall be hereafter exalted to the noblest enjoyments, or condemned to the most dreadful torments. Do not these representations of the Deity pass more easily into the understanding, and work more forcibly on the affections, than the profoundest researches of philosophers into the nature of infinity, or the most solid chain of arguments on the connection of cause and effect? Indeed the sacred writers are always more intent on sanctifying our hearts, than on amusing our imagination. Hence they abound with such representations of our Creator, as are likely to produce not transient and wild admiration, but calm and permanent confidence. Hence too the attributes of God are so frequently and so pertinently united with the duties of man. Instead of bewildering us in intricate and abstract speculations upon unity, they tell us that we are *to worship the Lord our God, and him only we are to serve*. Instead of multiplying curious and disputable distinctions about the abstract essence, and the negative or positive properties of spiritual and corporeal beings, they emphatically pronounce *God to be a spirit*; and to this speculative dogma they instantly affix a

practical precept; for we are therefore *to worship him in spirit and in truth.*

Before this audience it would be unnecessary for me to enlarge on the doctrine of tutelary deities, which seems to have prevailed in every country, and of which numberless instances are recorded in sacred and profane writings. But the uncontrolled, the unrivalled, and the undivided power; the universal presence and unceasing agency of the true God, are again and again asserted in the scriptures. He is *Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end.* He is the *Father of light, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* He is the Creator and Ruler of all things, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom;* the patient Master, who is willing *that all should come to repentance;* the just God, who will *reward every man according to his works;* the gracious and merciful God, *who gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* What, I beseech you, can be more convincing to our judgment, or more improving to our hearts, than these representations of the Deity? Do they not invite us to confidence, as well as humble us into fear? Meditation on such a Being, so constantly and so wonderfully em-

ployed in promoting the good of his creatures, tends surely to crush every selfish, and to enlarge every generous affection of the soul. It exalts the dignity of our nature, when we conceive ourselves capable of obtaining his approbation ; it softens the heart into compassion, and expands it into benevolence, when we consider mankind as framed and supported by the same Almighty power, redeemed by the same goodness, and intended together with ourselves for the same glorious and *incorruptible inheritance in heaven*. The pride of knowledge, the splendor of conquest, and the pageantry of power, shrink into obscurity and insignificance, when we reflect on him *whom the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain*. All the lurking impurities of our souls are seen with loathing, and all the secret crimes of our lives remembered with horror, while we consider that he *trieth the very heart and reins, and that his eye seeth afar off*. All the dark and tempestuous scenes of the world cease to alarm and depress us, adversity loses her sting, and prosperity assumes new and more delightful charms, when we consider that no event takes place without the appointment of our Maker, *that not a sparrow falleth to the ground* without his notice, and that in his

sight *we are of more value than many sparrows.*

In respect to a Future Life, the belief of it has, we know, prevailed almost universally, and yet, as to the particular kinds and degrees of enjoyment reserved for us, nations and individuals have differed widely from each other. The Indian, enfeebled by age, or tortured by sickness, gladly resigns his breath, in hopes of receiving again the bow by which he had gained his sustenance, and destroyed his enemies ; and meeting again the dog, who had been the faithful companion of his dangers and his toils. The hardy warrior of the North welcomed the hour of death, which was to carry him into the hall of Odin, where, in his imagination, the ghosts of departed heroes were permitted to remember and to celebrate the exploits performed on earth, and to quaff the most delicious liquor from the skulls of the foes, whom they had slain in battle. Virgil describes his heroes as engaged in the same pursuits, and attached to the same pleasures, which had been long familiarized and endeared to them in their former existence^b. Mahomet too, as

^b Pars in gramineis exercent membra palæstris,
Contendunt ludo, et fulva luctantur arena.
Pars pedibus plaudunt choreas, et carmina dicunt.

we have seen, in the sensual paradise which he announced, prepared for his followers scenes of the most alluring voluptuousness.

Now, whatever allowance the man of deep reflection may make for the ignorance and superstition of barbarous countries, and whatever entertainment the man of refined taste may derive from the compositions of more enlightened writers, both surely will agree in approving the silence of the scriptures as to the particular state of things in a future life.

Reason informs us, that the present is a probationary state of discipline; and in conformity to such a state, religion adapts all her doctrines to faith, all her encouragements to hope, and all her regulations to practice. Christianity, holding up to us the prospect of our future existence, bids us now prepare for it by virtuous habits of thought and action; and philosophy will inform us, that those habits in a great scheme of moral government are neither recommended by the Creator, nor acquired by the creature in vain. We are therefore to believe, that a real, an inti-

Quæ gratia currum
Armorumque fuit vivis, quæ cura nitentes
Pascere equos; eadem sequitur tellure repostos.
ÆNEID. vi.

mate, and most important connection subsists between the present life and that which is to follow it; though it surpass our abilities to explain, and perhaps to comprehend, the particular powers with which we shall be invested, and the particular agency in which we are to be employed. Christianity may then be excused for not gratifying our curiosity on subjects, to which our apprehensions are now utterly inadequate; and even were they more adequate, it would deserve our praise for informing us of what is true, that we are destined for immortality; and for instructing us in what is most important, the duties by which we are to gain it. From some passages in the scriptures it may be inferred, that our moral pursuits and our intellectual endowments will bear some resemblance to the present: and on this supposition is founded the necessity of regulating the one by the strictest virtue, and of improving the other by the sublimest knowledge. In favour of this inference from the sacred writings, analogy certainly pleads. Children are possessed of powers and affections, which are in process of time to be drawn out into action; upon the right use of which depends their happiness or their misery, and in the cultivation of which, therefore, they are as-

sisted at a time when they cannot look forward either to the end for which they are to act, or to the connection of that end with the means that are now taking to enable them to act well. In the same manner we are training up to habits, and exercising powers, which are to acquire new vigour, and to operate through a wider sphere, *when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption*. Certainly we are not justified in expecting that indolent repose, in which an Epicurean would place his felicity, or those rapturous and fervent devotions, in which *alone* the Enthusiast supposes the joys of the blessed to consist: much less are we authorized to look for sensual gratifications, or the gaudy trappings of wealth and power.

The policy or the pride of the Greeks and Romans often induced them to confine the rewards of Eternity to the few who acted with splendor on the public theatre of life; to wise legislators, to valiant heroes, and mighty conquerors. But the gospel announces resurrection and judgment, together with the happiness or misery that are to follow them, to men of all ages, and all countries, of all capacities and all stations. It offers the bright recompence of *a crown that fadeth not away*, as well to the silent

and solid virtues of meekness and charity, as to the more shining and exalted excellencies of valour in a just cause, and the disinterested love of our country. It does not confound and weary the understanding, by representing the various stages of our being as resulting from a long train of physical causes, which God has appointed, and which affect each other by secret but uninterrupted ties; but it exhibits the doctrine of Futurity continually and professedly in a moral, and therefore a more useful point of view. It tells us, that *the things which are seen, and are temporal*, have a reference to those things *which are not seen, and are eternal*: and that in both the same glorious design is uniformly carried on. It connects what we are to practise with what we are to believe; and thus extends the influence of Futurity over our social and religious relations, over our conduct in private and public life, and even over our words and thoughts. Such is the effect of Christianity with regard to its doctrine of *a judgment to come*. And as to the happiness which is to succeed that judgment, it still holds the same firm but unadorned language; and still directs all its declarations to the same great and good purpose, of *making us wise unto salvation*. Thus

we are told, that *this mortal shall put on immortality* ; we are encouraged to hope for admission into the presence of *the spirits of just men made perfect* ; we are to see the everlasting God, *face to face, and know him, even as we are known.*

In these representations there are no impure or fantastic ideas : all is simple, yet majestic ; all is wonderful, yet credible ; all is captivating, and at the same time instructive.

When the actions of every day and every hour have this intimate connection with our eternal doom, is it not to be expected, that religion will have a forcible and constant influence over our lives ? That influence, it must be confessed, is often counteracted by our infirmities, our prepossessions, and our headstrong appetites. Yet Christianity far surpasses every other religion in its visible tendency to make us better men, and in its real effects upon the sentiments and the manners of mankind. Every instance of improvement, which this discourse is intended to point out, as resulting from Christianity, in government, laws, and sciences, may be considered as a presumptive argument of its efficacy in matters purely of a religious nature : the same commands and

the same sanctions, which have quickened the efforts of men in securing their spiritual well-being, have been indirectly the instruments of increasing their temporal. The same expectation of a righteous judgment which makes us good men, tends at the same time to make us useful and ornamental members of society. The same elevation of mind which actuates the bosom of a being, who reveres himself as the heir of immortal life, inspires every noble sentiment, and animates to every arduous undertaking, which can adorn and dignify human nature in this state of mortality.

SECONDLY. The influence of religion upon the Moral powers of man seems to be even more important than that which it has upon the powers of his Understanding. Upon the latter it operates only by distant and insensible degrees ; and produces its effect rather by establishing its habits, than by altering its constitution. But upon the former its influence is immediate. Assuming an authority which supersedes every other law of his nature, and speaking to him with a voice which commands his obedience and assent, it is able to mould the opinions and purposes of his being ; and to suit every sentiment of his heart to the rules it prescribes.

What is right or wrong, what is fit for him to pursue or proper to avoid, it can establish with higher sanctions, than the deductions of reason, or the consciousness of feeling, can claim : and the voice of nature, when opposed to its commands, is either awed into silence, or sinks into neglect.

On the nature, therefore, of religion depends in a great measure the Moral character of man. The doctrines which it teaches, and the precepts which it enjoins, in every case of their tendency, must determine his opinions and his conduct : and as, when united with the interests of mankind, they may be supposed to give a more powerful motive to his exertions and his humanity ; so, when opposed to them, they are able to vanquish every instinct of his nature, and to stamp with the semblance of virtue whatever is hurtful to his kind.

The moral influence of any system of opinions depends upon their relation to the welfare of mankind ; and in judging of them, we determine their utility by the nature of the *general Spirit* they inculcate, and the *particular Duties* they enjoin. Upon whatever principle the Nature of virtue is rested, its End seems uniformly to be supposed in the production of general good : and whatever

may be the character of any particular Duty, the principle upon which it is approved is its relation to this End. Every system of religious opinion, therefore, will improve the moral powers of man, in proportion as the Spirit which it inculcates is that of general humanity; and as the Duties which it enjoins are in themselves beneficial.

In reviewing the general history of religion, we observe a corruption and weakness in the nature of man, which has too often rendered both the Spirit which it establishes, and the Duties which it prescribes, prejudicial to the welfare of humanity.

The possession of divine favour, and of peculiar inspiration, with which so many nations so often and so falsely have flattered themselves, instead of inspiring sentiments of compassion or humanity for those whom heaven had so much less distinguished; or of exciting that pious gratitude which naturally unites itself with benevolence and pity towards the ignorant and the deceived; has in general been productive only of arrogance and inhumanity; of a spirit at the same time presumptuous in its estimate of its own claims to favour, and uncharitable in its interpretation of those of other men. To be the favoured of heaven, is the distinction

most grateful to the imaginations of men : and while it insensibly unites with private and national pride, it seems to justify that sense of superiority, which men are at all times disposed to entertain of themselves and of their nation. The rest of mankind, involved in ignorance, or deluded by error, appear the objects of a pity which borders upon contempt ; and their unwillingness to desert superstitions which seem so absurd, or to receive truths which seem so plain, appears to imply a barbarity which it is proper to despise, or an obstinacy which it is just to correct. The gloom in which heaven leaves them to wander is sometimes thought to indicate some original inferiority in their nature, or some acquired depravity which the Deity designs to punish : and in either case he seems to establish a boundary, by which his chosen and favoured people are separated from those impure and corrupted nations, who are the enemies of divine truth, or the objects of divine wrath.

Wherever men have acted, these prejudices have in some degree influenced their conduct. The spirit of religious zeal has increased the strength, and sharpened the asperity of national animosity : and the principles of peace and humanity, upon which the

public welfare of mankind is reposed, have been seen to perish under the influence of opinions, which in the mercies of heaven have found a warrant for cruelty, and which make us perceive in man only the enemy of man.

Whatever has been the character of religion, the same Spirit of party and hostility seems to have animated its professors. Under every different climate, and amidst every dissimilarity of manners; in the mild and peaceful doctrines of Brama, as well as in the ruder systems of more Northern superstitions; the temporal influence of religion, by the regulations of private intercourse, as well as by the injunction of open hostility, has operated so as to divide mankind from each other, and to establish permanent barriers to their commerce and their improvement. And if in any periods of the history of human affairs more liberal principles seem to have counteracted this fatal infirmity, they are to be found only in the ages of ancient polytheism, under the influence of religions too gross to interest the vanity, or to awaken the passions of mankind; and too much diversified in their objects, to excite either zeal or resolution in their support.

The same weakness, which has thus cor-

rupted the *general Spirit* of religion, seems also to have affected the *peculiar Duties* it prescribes ; and, by the unaccountable perverseness of human nature, even the *particular Virtues* it has enjoined have too often become not less adverse to the welfare of men, than the *general character* which it has established.

That purity of life is the best tribute that can be offered to the Deity, is the doctrine indeed of reason ; but seems not in general to have influenced the conduct of reasonable beings. The pleasures, which the constitution of humanity has annexed to the performance of moral duty, appear to connect it too intimately with our interest to render it a voluntary or acceptable offering : and the pious mind, oppressed with the sense of divine favour, and animated with the ambition of displaying its gratitude, seeks naturally for surer and severer proofs of its thankfulness and its devotion. Amidst austerities and mortifications, its piety seems best to be evinced : to the sensual and impure gratifications of the present life, it appears unseemly for the imagination, which is conversant in divine meditation to descend ; and the sacrifice of all that ministers to the comfort or enjoyment of a tem-

poral being, is considered as the fit purchase of the joys of immortality, and as the sole discipline in which the mind can be trained for its pure employments.

The mass of mankind, indeed, seldom share in this sublime infirmity. But other passions, more suited to their character and habits, unhappily cooperate with this pious prejudice, and assist it in the separation of moral duty from religious obedience. What to the pure and upright mind seems too easy a service, is to the corrupted and sensual a bondage too severe to be borne. The restraints of passion, the denial of appetite, the calm perseverance of virtuous conduct, are severities which the generality of mankind have neither tempers resolute enough to practise, nor imaginations pure enough to comprehend. But the observance of the forms, and the infliction of the austerities of superstition all men can practise. They require not a permanent, but a temporary mortification: they exhaust not the imagination by demanding its constant employment on those high and mysterious subjects to which the mind approaches with dread; but adapt themselves to those occasional seasons of despondence or apprehension, when men seek

to make their peace with God: and while they persuade the sinner, that by this voluntary punishment he has expiated his errors and his crimes, they seem to bid him return again into the world, and relapse into the indulgence of all his desires.

Wherever religion has been established among mankind, somewhat of this weakness has attended it. The pious and the corrupt mind, from different, but equally fatal causes, have separated its duties from those of morality: and the interests of mankind have suffered, as well from the pure and upright votary, who considered those interests as below his cares, as from the unhallowed worshipper, who imagined that the performance of its ritual duties afforded a licence for his violation of its moral injunctions.

While mankind are thus disposed, by some secret kind of infirmity, to the corruption of religion, a system of religious opinions which falls in with these prejudices, and avails itself of them, cannot but be hurtful to the moral character and capacities of man. With this fatal influence, it is easy to perceive that Mahometism is attended: and while it assumes to itself the high pretension of divine original, both the *Spirit* which it inculcates,

and the *Duties* which it prescribes, are nearly as inimical to the welfare of humanity, as the rudest forms of barbarous superstition.

To that religious pride which all men are disposed to entertain, and which so often has covered the scene of their transactions with blood, the doctrines of Mahomet have afforded an encouragement and permanency, which is unprecedented even in the history of religious error. To the pious Mussulman the rest of mankind are proscribed as the objects of his aversion or contempt: the hand of his prophet has even marked repeatedly, and authoritatively, the limits within which his humanity ought to be employed; and to his eye the various multitudes who stand without this barrier are blended under one common colouring of ignorance and opposition to the truth, and of hopeless exclusion from the knowledge of the divine will here, and the privileges of the divine favour hereafter. The sword, by which the conquests of the prophet were attained, and which far more effectually than the boldness of his pretensions, or the wisdom of his Koran, subdued the obstinate prepossessions of his countrymen, is left as the most precious inheritance to the successors of his power: and while their piety is united with their

ambition and their pride, to the private Mussulman the prospect of eternal enjoyment is held out as the reward of his labours in the desolation of humanity. The honour of his country, the success of his faith, and the sense of the importance and superiority of his own character, are connected with this spirit of undistinguishing and uncontrolled hostility to the rest of his species: and the same fatal delusions which occasionally deluged the East for ages in blood, have silently, but uniformly, operated upon the private sentiments of men, so as to narrow their social affections within the bounds of their own persuasion, and to create enemies in all that are not numbered under the banners of the prophet. While the religion of Mahomet thus naturally tends to divide mankind, whether as individuals or nations, from each other; and while it checks the diffusion of humanity by retarding the improvement and happiness of human kind, its effects are not less malignant upon the moral character of man, by the rules and precepts it prescribes. Of that liberal piety which is founded as well in the understanding as in the heart; which examines where it approves, and which displays the sincerity of its approbation by rectitude of intention and purity of conduct,

the generality of mankind, from their contracted habits of thought, as well as their laborious stations in life, are in a great measure incapable. They indeed believe in a moral governor and judge of the universe: they reverence his attributes, and would conciliate his favour: but it accords better with their wishes and their prejudices, to confine the practice of religion to those austerities and forms, which require little mental purity, or intellectual exertion to perform. A religion, therefore, which avails itself of this infirmity, must necessarily be supposed to give a sanction to these natural though destructive errors, and to be productive of all the evils that result from them.

If it be true, as the enemies of revelation contend, that mankind are often not actuated by their principles, it is equally true, may the Christian say, that they in few instances totally and deliberately renounce them. Error gains assent by the resemblance it bears to truth; and superstition sanctifies its usurpations by urging some of those claims, which true religion has ever employed with success upon the common sense of mankind. Hence no religion, be its promises ever so alluring, its ceremonies ever so frequent, and its injunctions ever so peremptory, can keep

any firm hold on the reason or the imagination of men, unless it calls in the aid of the moral sense, and recommends some duties which that sense approves. Even the coarsest and most despicable systems of superstition pretend to give a greater or less sanction to those offices which the experience of men found necessary for the happiness of that society in which they arose: and therefore the distinction which lies between true and false religion is this: That religion is false, which, professing to be intended for the use of all nations, is distorted in its doctrines, and narrowed in its precepts, by the prejudices and manners of any one particular age and any one particular country. That religion is probably true, which, challenging the enquiries, and demanding the obedience of every age and every country, is calculated to promote their temporal as well as eternal interest; to cooperate with every useful quality in their government, laws, and manners; and gradually to correct whatever is defective or injurious in them. But the general and vague recommendation of virtue forms no part of the *peculiar* character of *any* religion, since it is equally common to all. The influence of a religion upon morality is, therefore, to be determined by the relation

which the peculiar duties it prescribes have to the general welfare of men ; and the motives which of itself it affords to the discharge of those grand and universal duties, which time and place may indeed modify in their degree, but without suspending their obligation. Considered in this light, the religion of Mahomet presents itself to us, as containing precepts more adverse, perhaps, to the well-being of mankind than are to be found in any other instance of religious delusion. The Mussulman is commanded, indeed, to be just and charitable ; and this command every other religion, however false, would not fail to impose. But justice and charity form only a small and subordinate part of his obedience. He must abstain from the innocent enjoyment of the bounties of nature, with a rigour which lessens the comforts of social intercourse, and represses very much the noble emotions of friendship and affection. He must approach the Deity, not at the seasons of his own gratitude ; but at prescribed hours, which often arrive without the preparation of his heart ; and which return with such frequency, and must be practised with such exactness, as tend surely to create ostentatious hypocrisy, or abject pusillanimity ; to slacken punctuality into indiffer-

ence ; or inflame zeal into fanaticism. In whatever situation he is placed, he must perform ablutions, which often interfere with the practical duties of life ; and of which the forms and circumstances would be ridiculous in the recital, if indeed they deserved not a severer appellation, when considered as the evidences of virtue and piety. To fill up the measure of his devotion, the Mahometan must leave his friends, his family, and his country, and expose himself to the dangers of a tedious journey, through barren sands and beneath a burning sky, to visit the Temple of Mecca, with ceremonies which alike corrupt the understanding, and degrade the dignity of a rational and immortal being.

Such are the duties to which the followers of Mahomet are bound ; and little must the prophet have known of the human heart, if he imagined that the prescription of such a ritual was serviceable to the cause of real piety ; if he believed that by the introduction of burthensome ceremonies he insured the sincerity of religion ; or if he ventured to hope, that any other consequence could arise from such precepts, than the observance of the forms of devotion without its spirit ; and the confinement of the emotions of virtue to

that precise limit within which they were circumscribed.

But let us turn our eyes awhile from a prospect so disgusting.

To the narrow and selfish views of the Arabian impostor, and to the lifeless and unprofitable ceremonies which he appointed, let us oppose the sublime and disinterested philanthropy of our holy religion, the simplicity of its precepts, and the connection even of its ceremonial ordinances with the practice of moral virtue. Unlike the confined and narrow institutions of the Koran, the gospel of Christ breathes a spirit of benevolence as universal as it is pure. Unconnected with the machinations of human policy, or the schemes of human ambition, it proposes to establish no other kingdom, but that of righteousness and peace. No restrictions of national prejudices, no differences of religious opinion or modes of worship, are suffered to restrain its operation. The believer and the infidel, the friend and the enemy, are, by a peculiarity which distinguishes Christianity from every other religion, equally entitled to our good offices, and our prayers. In vain, therefore, will the faithful Mussulman, the Roman patriot, or the Grecian moralist, contrast their fa-

vourite virtues with that enlarged and comprehensive charity, which embraces the whole race of men, and knows no bounds but those which God has prescribed to his creation. In the delightful exercise of these transcendent virtues, extended and exalted as they are by the religion of Jesus, the pious Christian finds no obstruction from the observance of ceremonies devoid of use, and even of meaning. He is indeed directed to keep two ordinances, one of which is the mark of his admission into the faith, the other of his continuance in it: yet to neither of them, when unconnected with moral conduct, does the gospel ascribe either dignity or use. Both, on the contrary, involve a solemn promise of obedience to that law, which, as it was originally impressed by the Almighty on the heart of man, so has it been since finally ratified and illustrated by the revelation of Christ.

If such is the faith which we profess; if it promotes every social virtue in an extent unknown not only to the Mahometan, but even to every other religious system; if its ceremonies are few and easy, and those equally productive of the fear of God and the love of our fellow-creatures; if it binds together in the most powerful manner the interests of mankind with the duties of reli-

gion, shall we hesitate a moment to confess it a system every way worthy of the infinite wisdom which formed it ; a system, which, if adhered to with zeal and sincerity, would reconcile the views, and calm the animosities which subsist in the world ; would unite all mankind as partners in one common interest, and teach them to rest their hopes of eternal happiness in the next life on the practice of piety and moral rectitude in the present.

Such are the influences, which Mahometism and Christianity severally have upon the human character ; and such the difference, which they would of themselves naturally produce in the appearance of our temporal affairs, and the exertions of our moral powers. But though this diversity of operation be obvious, it is necessary to remark, that this operation may not always be equally prominent, or equally intense ; that other concurrent and collateral causes may as well limit the tendency of the religion of Christ, as diminish the influence of Mahometan superstition. Religion, it is apparent, is not the only employment of the mind of man : a variety of other causes, in government, in climate, and manners, are constantly acting upon his powers, and fashioning his character : and though a pure and

sublime religion has an evident and real tendency to exalt the capacities of his mind ; yet a religion the most pure and sublime may exist with a form of government so corrupt, or with a system of manners so depraved, as to lose a great part of its influence on the human mind. There are probably circumstances in the constitution of European and Asiatic governments, and still more, it has been said, in the different influences of their climate and situation, which prevent the religions by which they are distinguished from producing their full and natural effects upon the actions of those who have embraced them : and if speculations of this kind were the proper subjects of this place, it might not perhaps be difficult to shew, what are the causes which in one situation have prevented the rational and exalted theology of Christ from attaining its proper effect upon the character of those who have adopted it as a rule of faith and conduct ; and which on the other hand have rescued, in part, the disciples of Mahomet from the fatal influences of his doctrines. But it is sufficient for me to have shewn the different tendency which these religions have, from their intrinsic and distinguishing properties, to affect our moral agency : and

since every cause must be judged of by its proper effects, enough, I trust, has been advanced to prove, that the one is naturally beneficial, and the other as naturally hurtful, to the intellectual, the social, and the religious character of man.

From a short review of the subjects that have been discussed, and of the arguments that have been adduced in the course of these Lectures, the superiority of the religion taught by Christ over that of Mahomet will be sufficiently apparent to justify our approbation of the one, and our rejection of the other. We first endeavoured to shew, that, as the Mahometan imposture was indebted for its success to causes visibly and merely human, so the rapid propagation of Christianity is to be referred chiefly to the immediate interposition of God; that the extent of a religion is not simply and independently of circumstances a proof of its truth, and that, upon the exclusion of this most necessary distinction, idolatry and heathenism may boast of higher triumphs over Mahometism, than Mahometism itself can,
^b from the number of its adherents and the

^b It has been said, that, if we divide the known regions of the world into thirty equal parts, the Christians will be found to be in possession of five, the Mahometans of six, and the Idolaters of nineteen. See *Brerewood*, p. 79.

wide diffusion of its doctrines, claim over Christianity.

When the character of Mahomet was compared with the character of Christ, the contrast was most striking. In the pretended prophet of Arabia we discovered under the mask of religious zeal the combined vices of lust, cruelty, and worldly ambition in his motives, and of worldly craft in his measures. But in the blessed Redeemer of mankind we contemplated, with reverential love and gratitude, the most enlarged philanthropy united with the most sublime devotion; a dignity tempered by meekness, and an humility quite remote from meanness; a consistency, which no variety of situation could shake; a disinterestedness, which no temptations of secular glory could seduce; a fortitude, calm without insensibility, exemplary without ostentation, and equally superior to the afflictions of life, and to the tortures of death.

Mahometism, we have seen, is totally unsupported by external evidence; while the credibility of the gospel is attested by miracles, which omnipotence alone could have performed; and by the prediction of events, which omniscience alone could have foreseen.

We have found that the Koran even re-

futes its own claim to a divine authority, as well by what it denies as by what it concedes: that, considered in the light of a revelation to regulate our conduct, and to confirm our hopes, it was altogether unnecessary; that it is true so far only as it adopted the doctrines of a preceding religion, and that where it differs from them, it is grossly improbable, or evidently false; in short, that in many instances it is unworthy of the wisdom, and in some even irreconcilable to the goodness of God. To errors which our reason may detect, and to deformities at which our common sense recoils, we opposed the purity and simplicity of the gospel; its consistence with the best discoveries of philosophy, and the immutable laws of nature; its conformity to the moral precepts and peculiar economy of the Mosaic system; and finally the invariable agreement, in which its commands, its sanctions, and its evidences stand with each other and with themselves.

In the present Lecture the comparison has been closed by an impartial consideration of the effects which each religion either is calculated to produce, or actually has produced; effects, which, on the one side, are as destructive to the pretensions of Mahometism, as on the other they are honourable

to the cause of Christianity. Indeed the more attentively we consider the imposture of Mahomet, the more firmly shall we disbelieve, and the more sincerely must we despise it. But in proportion as the proofs which support the gospel, and the doctrines which it conveys, are brought to the test of historical or philosophical criticism, the greater reason shall we have to felicitate ourselves on our profession of a religion, so adapted at once to the frailties and to the noblest capacities of our nature, and so friendly both to our temporal and eternal interests : a religion, which hitherto has resisted the sullen obstinacy of the Jew, the fierce hostility of the Mahometan, and the sceptical subtlety of the infidel ; a religion, which is more approved as it is more understood, and against which the God who founded it has expressly promised *that he will not suffer the gates of hell finally to prevail.*

To discover the credibility of the Christian revelation, the diligent and honest use of our own understanding alone is requisite. May the grace of God so sanctify our hearts, that we may feel its importance in every period of our lives ; that in the hour of death we may be sustained by its comforts ; and admitted to all its glorious privileges in the day of judgment.

While, however, we cleave to the truth, with steadiness of judgment and in sincerity of spirit, let us be disposed to lament, rather than to rail at, the opposition of those who have not been hitherto brought by the providence of God within the pale of the Christian Church. Though justified in our own faith by the solemn testimony of our own consciences, we are very incompetent judges of the known, as well as of many unknown difficulties, which, arising from early prepossession, from habitual persuasion, from an honest dread of change in the awful concerns of religion, or from a reverential and fond attachment to the supposed virtues and sanctity of their admired prophet, may have prevented the followers of Mahomet from yielding to arguments, which they are unable to confute. Though bound to accept with thankfulness the gracious offers of salvation which have been made to ourselves, we cannot discern all the wise and excellent purposes, which the moral Governor of the universe may ultimately accomplish, by the ignorance or errors, in which many of his creatures are yet involved. In respect therefore to the revelation which is calculated to enlighten that ignorance, and to reform those errors, we act up to the full measure of our

duty, if we embrace it without hypocrisy, if we defend it without bitterness, and if, whilst we labour to disseminate its glorious truths, we seriously endeavour to make it the rule of our own conduct, no less than of our belief. By these means we shall most effectually and most honourably adorn the religion we profess; we shall recommend it to the approbation of the wise and good; we shall protect it from the assaults of the perverse and profligate; and shall gradually become the instruments of giving complete effect to the benevolent designs of that Being, who, in his own good time, will assuredly bring all the various nations of the world into one fold, under one shepherd, Jesus Christ the righteous.

SERMON X.

MARK xvi. 15.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

WHEN our Saviour, after the completion of his earthly ministry, was preparing to ascend into heaven, this was his great and last command to the apostles: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* Whilst he pointed out the end, he also prepared the means: he sent his Spirit from above, to fortify his apostles against danger, to console them under affliction, to dispel their scruples, and to correct their mistakes.

To these operations of the Holy Ghost on the minds of Christ's disciples was added the power of working miracles; so that extraordinary and ordinary causes at once conspired in supporting the efforts of those who were friends to the gospel, and in vanquishing the opposition of its fiercest and most formidable enemies.

But the work of salvation, so auspiciously begun by the apostles, was not continued with the same spirit of charity and truth by the succeeding ministers of Christ. More labour was exerted to allure those who were already followers of his religion with some distinction of sect or peculiarity of doctrine, than to reform the lives of the unconverted by its pure and simple precepts ; or to convince their understandings by the display of the genuine and characteristic doctrines which he had taught.

Christianity, whether we consider the promises of its Founder, or the spirit of its laws, is calculated for universal use, and claims universal belief. Its influence, however, must, from the very constitution of the moral world, necessarily be progressive ; and in different circumstances the knowledge of it will be in different degrees accelerated or retarded. The rude and uncivilized inhabitants of northern Europe more readily admitted the doctrines of the gospel than the polished and fastidious citizens of Athens and Rome.

To the impediments which operated in particular countries, may be added other causes, arising from the general state of the world. The want of a large and liberal intercourse among the inhabitants of the earth

prevented for a time the diffusion of Christian knowledge. When nations became known to each other, the objects, to which their attention was generally turned, had but little connection with the concerns of religion. Some were intent upon amassing wealth, and some upon grasping dominion. The traveller was content with gratifying a vacant curiosity; and the philosopher was chiefly employed in exploring the works of nature, without transferring his observations to any subject of utility; or in remarking the dissimilarities of opinion and manners that exist among mankind, without the opportunity, or even the wish, to reform them.

In such times and under such circumstances it would have been vain to expect any plans for religious improvement, or any rational efforts for the dissemination of religious knowledge. Yet we have reason, perhaps, upon the whole, to congratulate ourselves, that the propagation of the gospel has rarely been the professed aim of any nation in the ages which are past. The wild and romantic object of the crusades, and the outrageous excesses committed during their continuance, are a proof that the Christian religion, even from its own inherent qualities, is incapable of being propagated by the

sword : and from the characters of the crusaders we may conclude, that the spirit which begins in a mistaken and religious zeal, passes by easy and imperceptible transition into political cunning, or insatiable ambition. Here then we find some of the causes, in consequence of which the light has not hitherto shone with effect among those nations, which still remain overshadowed by ignorance, or hardened in unbelief.

In succeeding times the labours of Christian countries have been vigorously and successfully employed rather in the improvement of religion, than in the propagation of it. Its evidences have been collected ; its doctrines have been elucidated ; the attacks of its enemies have been repelled ; and the morals of its professors, upon the whole, have been purified. The powers and views of the human understanding are limited : and probably to the compression of that strength, which has been exerted upon the proofs and illustrations of Christianity, where it is believed, may be ascribed the just and enlarged notions which now prevail in the nations of Europe. If more had been attempted, less probably would have been performed : if our zeal had been chiefly directed to the diffusion of the gospel, our ideas of its use

might have been less correct and less comprehensive.

From the inattention of the Europeans to the propagation of the gospel in these later ages of civilization, and from the contracted views or the odious barbarities of those who professed to propagate it in less enlightened times, the inhabitants of many countries as yet continue rooted in the ancient absurdities of Pagan superstition, or deluded by the arrogant and impious pretensions of that false prophet, who presumed to go forth, like another Messiah, in the East, and erected a larger kingdom on earth than the Son of the living God.

But to those, perhaps, who have a more just and extensive view of the subject, the very delay will ultimately be found accompanied with advantages, which, while they redound to the honour of the moral government of God, ought to give new animation to our own endeavours. Would, for instance, Christianity have been established in its original purity, or to any good practical purpose, by the rapacious conqueror, by the roving adventurer, or by the visionary philosopher? Where should we have seen any traces of Christian charity, or of rational piety, in that system of opinions and that

plan of ceremonial worship, which the frantic and sanguinary zeal of the crusader would probably have established? Would not the gloom of papal superstition, and the severities of papal domination, have been spread and exercised more widely? Might not the spirit of superstition have gained an accession of strength with the change of its object, if the gospel had been first introduced by those who could not so far understand it, as to distinguish between its genuine and pretended doctrines? We therefore, who live in these enlightened times, have peculiar opportunities of doing what has been left undone by our forefathers; and for planning with wisdom, and executing with success, what they have either neglected, or attempted to do in vain. We have no misconceptions of Christianity to set right, no corruptions of it to purify. As Protestants, we have only to bear the Bible in our hands; to expatiate upon its importance and its truth; to teach what it reveals with sincerity; and to enforce what it commands with earnestness.

Christianity was at first established by extraordinary means; but though we presume not to look for the renovation of miracles, or to desire the instantaneous gift and utterance

of divers tongues, we are still enabled to accomplish the same conviction in the unbelieving nations, by an industrious acquisition of their various languages, and an acquaintance with their local prejudices, their manners, and their laws. These are the great duties of our mission ; and that the task has been zealously, and in some degree successfully performed, cannot be denied, without ingratitude to the piety and sufferings of many individuals, who may justly be accounted happy ornaments of our own Christian country and truly Christian church.

But it deserves particularly to be remarked, that, while our endeavours have been directed to the instruction of ignorant and savage tribes, the task of converting the more enlightened nations, who are led away by the false pretensions of the Arabian impostor, has been constantly declined as impracticable, or even opposed as inexpedient and dangerous.

To establish both the expediency and practicability of propagating it, is the purpose of this discourse. I mean not, however, to enter into an elaborate discussion of the general question relating to the *duty* of baptizing all nations. That this duty is incumbent on Christians of every age ; that

the command delivered in the words of my text, with a more immediate reference to the Apostles, is equally binding upon ourselves ; that, under a change of external circumstances, we can effect by ordinary measures what they were invested with extraordinary powers to perform ; are positions which it is unnecessary for me to establish. They have already been enforced with great strength of argument, and great splendor of eloquence, by several eminent writers, whose learning and whose liberal piety have done equal honour to their country, and to that respectable society to which they belong : sufficient therefore it is for me to declare, that I admit the justice of their reasoning, and cannot add much to its weight. But the age in which we live is, we know, distinguished by metaphysical refinement. The clearness of general deductions is, in the minds of many persons, obscured by the ingenuity with which particular objections are employed to gratify a fondness for novelty, and to weaken the authority of prescription. Detached and hypothetical arguments are suffered to destroy the collective force of proofs already methodized, and of facts already admitted. It becomes, us, therefore, to discuss the subject with some kind of accommodation to the

tempers and prepossessions of those whom we would convince : and with this view I shall in the following discourse FIRST endeavour to refute two objections which have been alleged against the propriety of *any* attempt to propagate the gospel ; and SECONDLY I shall consider at large the peculiar expediency of propagating it among Eastern nations.

It has been objected with some plausibility, that the Deity delights in the variety of religions which have appeared upon the face of the earth. The proposition is specious, but not new : for whatever pretension philosophers may put up to originality, the same thing has been said by one of those writers ^a, whom it is the custom of those same philosophers to ridicule for narrow conceptions and grovelling superstition. But as the general proposition carries in it something specious and imposing, it is worth our while to analyze it. And here we shall have reason to apprehend, that men have not argued upon solid grounds from themselves to the Creator. Variety in man pleases from sentiment ; from a sentiment *sui generis* : and

^a “ Forsitan et varietas hujusmodi, ordinante Deo, decorem
“ quendam parit in universo mirabilem.” *Marcilius Facinus*, in
his *Treatise on the Christian Religion*, chap. iv.

perhaps the physical source of it is to be found in the weakness of our understanding, which incapacitates us for the contemplation of good, beyond a certain aggregate ; or from the fickleness of our passions, which roam from one object to another, without any settled principle of choice. But neither the sentiment itself, nor the causes from which it probably proceeds, can, without impiety, be ascribed to the Deity. Here then there is no room for analogy : but there is a point of view in which another kind of analogy does exist, sufficient, it should seem, to vindicate the ways of the Creator, and to point out the duty of moral agents.

In the power of man over the animal and vegetable world, in the arts of civilization, in the means of drawing out the peculiar advantages, or counteracting the peculiar disadvantages of climate ; in the various expedients by which existence is preserved and made happy ; one nation and one age differs from another. Yet we are directed by our reason, and impelled by our better instincts, to reform abuses and extend improvements both in the physical and moral world. We teach the savage the art of healing ; we assist him in fencing off the inclemency of the weather ; we shew him the advantages of

government and laws. In all these exertions the moral principle is instantly accompanied with a strong sentiment of approbation. The government of God was, doubtless, wise and righteous before the communication of this knowledge: but in our apprehensions, it inevitably and justly becomes more defensible and illustrious, when the evils of life are lessened, or its blessings multiplied. The social principle seems implanted in us for this very purpose. The moral agency of man is the instrument by which the goodness of God acts upon man. And in this enlarged view it is that philanthropy puts forth its whole force, and excites the highest approbation. Now, the religious government of God seems perfectly correspondent to the natural and moral government of the world. And wheresoever there is a capacity in mankind to comprehend religious truths more largely, and to practise religious duties more exactly, that moment there arises a clear and strong obligation upon us to communicate those truths, and to encourage those duties, among our fellow-creatures. We look with admiration and gratitude upon the extraordinary interpositions, and upon the ordinary blessings which are conveyed to us in the course of his

providence, independently of our own counsels and our own exertions : but surely his benevolence is not less important, and his wisdom is even more conspicuous, in that constitution of the world which enables us, and in that frame of mind which impels us, to do good one to another. In doing this good, we are effectually carrying on the gracious designs of our Maker ; we obtain a more distinct and comfortable view of his government ; and, while we fill up the measure of our own duty as individuals, we complete the aggregate of that felicity, which the species itself is capable of attaining, and which therefore we justly conclude to be intended for those to whom it is in our power to communicate it. By these means the sphere of our rational and religious powers is enlarged ; the operation of physical and moral causes conspires to the same end ; the general stock both of virtue and of happiness connected with it is augmented ; and in the successful endeavours of those who diffuse the knowledge of the truth, and of those who embrace it, we see the highest consistence and perfection in that scheme of the divine government, where the interests of futurity are blended with those of the present life ;

and where the immediate reward of each man's merit is inseparably united with the increasing welfare of all.

I now proceed to detect the fallacy of another sophism, which owes its popularity rather to the confidence with which it is maintained, than to the ability with which it is supported. It is of little importance, we are told, what religion men profess, whether they admit one God, or more than one; whether they bow the knee at the altar of an imaginary or a real Deity, while they practise good morality. If then religion be a matter really indifferent and unimportant, let us intreat those who bring the objection to be consistent with themselves, and to suppress all the complaints which they have so often alleged against the superstitious bigot, and to check the raillery in which they have indulged themselves against the deluded fanatic. On the contrary, if religion have an immediate and extensive influence upon the peace of mankind; if, by regulating opinion, it even remotely affect practice, let us not hastily assume that it is always productive of evil consequences; and let us diligently endeavour to examine the circumstances in which it may be accompanied by such as are proper and efficacious.

Some of its doctrines are unquestionably congenial to the natural sentiments, which, however diversified by local or temporary causes, have prevailed in all ages and in all countries ; to those sentiments, which have their hold upon the wild barbarian, and the polished citizen ; to those sentiments, which agitate even the savage with wild admiration, and impress the philosopher with serious awe. It would be irrational to suppose, that these sentiments have nothing sound in their principles ; it would be false to assert, that they are barren of effect ; it would be dastardly to imagine, that the truths belonging to them will for ever elude enquiry ; and it would be unjust to presume, that when known they will not confer some advantage. But the question itself is, I am inclined to think, usually stated in a manner that is both incorrect and invidious. As Tully was led, by his enlarged and exact habits of thinking, to lament the separation between philosophy and eloquence, so will every impartial and diligent enquirer find reason to be dissatisfied, that religion should, even in idea, be divided from morality. The fact is, that, under proper directions, they act upon each other with an intense and incessant force ; that they correct the misconceptions, supply

the defects, and invigorate the proper energy of each other. Both are made for man, and for both man himself is made; if we may argue from the state where he is now placed, and from the faculties with which he is now endowed. There are many situations in which, impelled as he is by various desires, and assailed by various temptations, he finds sometimes salutary restraint, and sometimes useful direction, in what are called their distinct and appropriate powers. There are many occasions, on which he stands in need of their united aid, either when present considerations are too feeble to determine him in the choice of his ultimate interests; or when the prospect of futurity is for a moment too clouded and too remote, to keep him steady in the path which can alone preserve his innocence. These observations are strictly true, and deserve our most recollected attention, even when we are reasoning upon the supposition that Morality and Religion can with propriety be considered as distinct in mere speculation. But the terms are surely, upon every principle of profound and impartial examination, contracted, and distorted from their right meaning. Morality, in its full and just signification, includes all the duties of which a moral agent is capable, and all

the foundations of those duties which can be discovered by a rational being. Such it appears not only in the maxims of the wisest sages, but in the laws of the best regulated states, where, as in the institutions of a Solon or a Numa, religious as well as civil regulations have been permitted to hold a distinguished rank. Such it was in the Mosaic code ; such it is in those rules by which the Chinese, the Hindoos, and the Mahometans are instructed in the worship of their Creator, as well as in their conduct to their fellow-creatures ; such it seems to be in the opinions and customs which have been established in the darkest and most uncivilized nations ; and such it continued, as they gradually emerged from ignorance and from barbarism.

Religion, therefore, if we appeal to the common apprehensions of mankind, forms a *part* of morality : and surely it is not the less valuable, or the less probable, because it contains directions and sanctions that relate to the whole.

Now, if the objector maintains that many religions which have gained credit in the world are false, we consider the question as then shifted from the point of Importance to the point of Truth. We deny any inferences

from the fact alleged, which insinuate that none therefore can be true : we maintain, that if any one religion be true, it cannot be wholly unimportant ; and in estimating that importance, we have a right to insist that the comparison be made, not only between the hypothetical consequences of any religion or none, but between the actual consequences of that, which we allow with the objector to be false, and that, which, in opposition to him, we are prepared to defend as the true.

As scholars, we admire the composition, and, under many useful restrictions, we may, as philosophers, admit the doctrine of the Universal Prayer, in which a writer of our own nation has united the most beautiful poetry with the most sublime devotion. He there means to affirm, that Jews, and Heathens, and Christians, equally acknowledged the existence of a supreme and intelligent cause, however they might distinguish him by different names, adore him in different forms, and even ascribe to him different attributes. But from this fact, which we readily admit, he does not draw the hazardous and unfair conclusion, which alone I am concerned to refute. He does not say, that the notions entertained of the Deity were equally just ; that the worship they paid

him was equally acceptable ; and that either in a speculative or a practical, in a philosophical or a religious light, it was totally *indifferent* whether our faith was directed to the Olympian Jove, or to the invisible Lord of Heaven and Earth.

In every country, it is true, God has given some witness of himself ; has implanted some notions of his being and perfections ; has received some instances of adoration and obedience, from those whom he has made. In every country also he has given proofs of his creative power and providential care ; has bestowed some advantages which deserve the gratitude of mankind ; and exposed them to some evils, for protection from which they must have recourse to his gracious assistance, conveyed to them (as indeed most of his blessings are) by intermediate causes, by human activity, and human prudence. But in his religious as well as in his temporal dispensations, there is a great and an incontestable inequality : and to correct that inequality is often within our power ; and when in our power, it assuredly becomes our indispensable duty. We relieve, as was before observed, the distressed ; we are conscious, in relieving them, of employing the means which God has given us, to the ends for

which he designed them : and, in the hour of solemn and deep meditation, we are led to admire that constitution of the universe, by which man is qualified and impelled to promote the happiness of man ; and by which also physical evil becomes subservient to the production of moral good. What then, I would ask, are the reasons which prevent our application of the same principles in the instruction of the ignorant and the mistaken? We communicate the improvements of law, and the discoveries of science : why then are we to be indifferent about imparting juster notions of religion? Is truth less congenial to the mind upon these subjects than error? Is it so difficult to be communicated, as always to baffle our endeavours, or so insignificant when communicated, as in no degree to reward them? The capacity of mankind to receive and to profit by religious instruction is, I confess, different in different circumstances. Great candour, doubtless, and great caution are necessary in conducting the work. The progress of it will be retarded by sluggish apprehension, by languid attention, or by perverse opposition. The effects of it may, for a time, be counteracted by preconceived opinions, by inveterate habits, by the passions and propensities of indi-

viduals ; or by peculiarities in the manners, and it may be the climates, of a whole people. But these causes operate surely in all our attempts to enlighten men by knowledge, and to meliorate them by laws : and if the experiment be made successfully in the one case, why should we despair of success in the other?

Every change that we attempt in the laws and the employments of a people, must be made, if it be made wisely, with some reference to their religious tenets and modes of worship. The degree and the order in which we endeavour to improve them respectively will depend upon a variety of causes, which it will require our utmost sagacity to ascertain, and our utmost caution to manage. But all are capable of improvement : and that scheme has the fairest chance for speedy and complete execution, is most noble in itself, and will be most beneficial in its effects, which, by a well-proportioned attention to the parts, bestows harmony and stability upon the whole.

We have seen in a former Discourse, that European nations are indebted for their superiority to their religious creed, as well as to their civil institutions, or their philosophical attainments ; that each of these moral causes

has a wide and visible influence ; that there is a sphere for their united as well as for their distinct agency ; that they assist in the improvement of each other ; that they have their principles in the common nature of man ; and that in their well-directed and well-exerted energies they conspire to one common end, in enlarging our intellectual powers, in meliorating our social affections, and in promoting our true and proper happiness, as Citizens, as Christians, and as Men.

I assume therefore confidently the efficacy of religion ; and I am warranted by experience in contending for the beneficial efficacy of the Christian. In nations already baptized, we condemn the bigot and the fanatic upon principles both of revelation and reason ; I mean upon their fundamental and consistent principles ; upon the express precepts of the one, and upon the clearest dictates of the other. We know that the illiberal spirit of the bigot, and the absurd notions of the fanatic, have a direct and unfriendly influence upon their moral conduct, and render them unfit for the present as well as the future world. Bigots and fanatics are to be found in those nations whom we wish to baptize : the source of their imperfections lies in the wrong apprehensions they enter-

tain of the Deity himself, of the laws which he prescribes, and of the means by which his favour is to be conciliated. If then Christianity, honestly and rationally taught, be likely to correct their errors, to assuage their groundless fears, to soften their unsocial tempers, and eventually to open a wider field for their talents and their virtues, we are bound, from a mere regard to its usefulness, to open every avenue by which the knowledge of it may be conveyed to distant nations. If we are persuaded of its truth, we may safely trust the consequences of its propagation to that omniscient Being, who has implanted in us an instinctive love of what is true, and has prepared our minds for the reception of it from adequate instruments, and upon favourable opportunities. If we are impressed with a sincere and grateful sense of its divine original, we shall manifest that sincerity and that gratitude, by our ardent wishes, and our unwearied endeavours to make other men partakers of those blessings which we ourselves enjoy. Truth, we allow, when metaphysically analyzed, derives its moral importance from its utility. But we contend, in our turn, that utility is, in an abstract point of view, naturally connected with truth; and therefore, with a reference to

both, we insist upon the expediency of propagating the gospel.

As to the obstinacy with which nations adhere to those religious tenets, which they have imbibed from education and contemplated with reverence, it furnishes no solid argument against our project: it is indeed a just and weighty reason for an increase of caution, and on the very same ground of difficulty, it becomes an additional incentive to an increase of diligence. You diffuse the light of philosophical knowledge, though it must lay open the fallacy and absurdity of many opinions, which tradition has preserved concerning the origin and structure of the world. You introduce such laws and customs, as in a course of time will bring on a material revolution in the manners of the nations with whom you are connected, and militate against many ritual observances, and, perhaps, some moral precepts, which are now protected by the supposed commands of the Almighty. Do you wish then, that they should deliberately and habitually disobey the religion they believe to be true; or, when you have gradually worn away the force of prejudice, and taught them by more comprehensive and precise modes of reasoning to reject it as false, do you mean to provide no

substitute? When your social habits and civil institutions are established on a firm foundation, and supported by general approbation and general concurrence, you may surely endeavour to avail yourselves of the prepossession which, in the minds of considerate and impartial men, they cannot fail to excite in favour of your religious code.

Doubts of a different kind from those I have examined under a former head have arisen with sensible men, how far the propagation of the gospel in some countries be upon the whole practicable or desirable: whether the doctrines of it would not be imperfectly understood, or grossly misconceived, or professed to no good purpose; whether as Gentilism and Judaism infected Christianity, so the favourite and inveterate superstitions of the American idolaters would not soon debase its purity, and counteract its efficacy. But this objection does not reach with its full force to the Mahometans of the East, who are lifted far above the ignorance of barbarians and the ferocity of savages; and a wider scope surely would be here given for instructing them successfully in the sublimer doctrines of Christianity. The savage, whose gloomy and confined theology was perhaps the growth of turbu-

lent passion and wild fancy, might easily be persuaded to admit the existence of miracles; from the similitude they bear to the supposed interpositions of his deities; from his incapacity to ascertain the force of natural causes; and from a kind of instinctive propensity to believe in those which are extraordinary. But the Mahometans, while they admit the principle of miracles, might be made more distinctly to conceive, and more readily to embrace the argument from prophecy, in all its nice dependencies and gradual evolutions. Among them we are not to contend with the boisterous tempers and stubborn habits which characterize the human species in a state of barbarism: we should find them already a race of men and citizens, who, by an easy transition, might pass to a full belief of the doctrines of Christianity.

For the propagation of the gospel in the East many inducements and advantages are held out to us, which the savage condition of the Indians of America does not afford. The Mahometans are an immense body of men, natives of populous and mighty empires, greatly exceeding in population the kingdoms of Christendom, and almost entirely occupying one quarter of the habit-

able globe. They are the subjects of regulated states; they are the observers of established laws; civilized by the intercourse of agriculture and commerce, and polished by the use of letters and of arts. They are neither involved in the impiety of atheism, nor the darkness of idolatry; and their religion, false as it is, has many articles of belief in common with our own: which will facilitate our labours in diffusing the true faith, and dispose them to receive it. They believe in one God, Creator and Lord of all; to whom they attribute infinite power, justice, and mercy. They hold the immortality of the soul; and expect a future judgment, a heaven and a hell; they acknowledge an universal deluge; they honour the patriarch Abraham as the first author of their religion; they acknowledge Moses and Christ to have been great prophets, and allow the Pentateuch and the Gospel to be sacred books.

Since, therefore, by our holy scriptures, the duty of attempting the universal conversion of mankind is amply ascertained; and since we find among the followers of Mahomet such favourable prepossessions and established doctrines, as will render easy the approach to their conversion, neither force of obligation, nor prospect of success, is

wanting, to encourage our progress and animate our zeal. By the ministers of the gospel the examples of those memorable times should never be forgotten, when the rigid and cruel edicts of Decius and Dioclesian were ineffectual to subdue the sacred enthusiasm of those faithful disciples of Christ, who, for the sake of gaining one proselyte to heaven, made a voluntary sacrifice of every temporal enjoyment, and nobly forfeited their liberties and lives. Compared with what they suffered and performed, how little is our labour, and how mild our obligation! To contend with the blindness and obstinacy of an idolatrous and wicked age, and to groan under the oppressions of an overspreading tyranny, was their severe, but glorious fate. It is ours to propagate the same religion in countries to which our commerce has extended, when its truths have been confirmed by the revolution of succeeding centuries, and when its excellence has been illustrated by the wisdom and experience of more enlightened times.

If any further inducement be wanting to excite our endeavours and animate our hopes in this work of charity, it is the consideration, that in remote and extensive provinces, *subject to our own empire*, and obedient to our

own laws, millions of the inhabitants *still* wander in darkness and error ; some deluded by the Mahometan imposture, and others bi-gotted to the more ancient and more absurd superstition of Brama.

The relation of a connected government, like that of a common country, is a tie that nature has made, and that never should be violated, or forgotten. Actuated, I would hope, by this exalted principle, we have already extended to our fellow-subjects in Indostan many of those natural and civil rights, which we have so long regarded with an honest pride, and vindicated with a noble ardour.

It behoves us, therefore, as Men, as Englishmen, and as Christians, to go farther. Let it not be said, that even at this boasted period of humanity and science, when we are diffusing the blessings of civil freedom over the remotest branches of the empire, no attempt is made to emancipate them from the chains of superstition.

Our settlements in India occupy a far greater extent than the British empire in Europe ; yet in no part of these wide provinces has one single effort been exerted to introduce the glorious light of the gospel, and to dispel the gloom which has for ages enveloped the wretched inhabitants. All the

differences in religion, which the native has ever known, are in reality but different modifications of error and impiety ; and though he refuse to subscribe to one imposture, he derives from that refusal no other advantage than the unhappy alternative of paying an implicit and servile reverence to another.

The grand distinction, however, is that which separates the Mahometans from the Gentoos. The latter were the original inhabitants ; and their superstition was of high antiquity and distinguished reputation in the country. The religion of Mahomet found its way into the distant regions of India by means similar to those by which it had been diffused over the intervening kingdoms. Within a century after the death of the impostor, the enterprising caliphs, amidst the rage of conquest by which they were animated, carried their arms into this country : and though unable to subject any considerable part to their empire and religion, yet they continued to harass it with repeated incursions through the succeeding ages. At length, however, in the fourteenth century of the Christian æra, directed by the same spirit of enthusiasm, the bolder genius of Tamerlane prompted him to engage in the conquest of these vast and populous regions, for the sole

and avowed purpose of rescuing the inhabitants from the absurdities of Paganism, and disseminating among them the saving truths of the holy religion of Islam!

In the prosecution of this romantic and visionary project he deluged the plains of Indostan with the blood of thousands of idolaters, and continued his impetuous career till at length opposition ceased before him, and the sanguinary doctrines of his pretended prophet were finally established on the ruins of the milder superstition of Brama.

Since the age of Tamerlane, Mahometism has been uniformly the religion of the government of India: the Gentoos, however, are still said to exceed in number the Mahometans in the proportion of ten to one*, and to retain at this day an originality of character, which neither the sudden violence of conquest, nor the slow operations of time, have in any considerable degree effaced.

The religious creed of the Gentoos is a system of the most barbarous idolatry. They acknowledge, indeed, one supreme God: yet innumerable are the subordinate deities whom they worship; and innumerable also are the vices and follies which they ascribe to them.

* See Orme's History of Indostan.

With a blindness which has ever been found inseparable from Polytheism, they adore as the attributes of their gods the weaknesses and passions which deform and disgrace human nature; and their worship is in many respects not unworthy of the deities who are the objects of it. The favour of beings, which have no existence but in the imagination of the superstitious enthusiast, is conciliated by senseless ceremonies and unreasonable mortifications; by ceremonies which consume the time which should be dedicated to the active and social duties; and by mortifications which strike at the root of every lawful and innocent enjoyment. What indeed shall we think of a religion, which supposes the expiation of sins to consist in penances, than which fancy cannot suggest any thing more rigorous and absurd; in sitting or standing whole years in one unvaried posture; in carrying the heaviest loads, or dragging the most weighty chains; in exposing the naked body to the scorching sun; and in hanging with the head downward before the fiercest and most intolerable fire?

But it were endless to dwell on all their superstitious rites. The following, which has been frequently confirmed to us without pre-

judice and without design, is alone sufficient to awaken every tender feeling of our hearts, and to incite us to the exertion of every effort which may tend to wean the minds of this unenlightened people from practices so impious and inhuman. It will easily be imagined that I allude to that most cruel custom, by which the wife of the Gentoo is induced to burn herself on the pile which consumes the ashes of her husband; a custom, if not absolutely enjoined by her religion, yet at least so far recommended by it, as to render the breach of it, in some cases, subject to the utmost ignominy and detestation.

The facts which I have recited, as well as many others of equal importance, are too well known to be denied. From these alone every humane heart will at once infer the necessity of endeavouring to substitute the pure and rational religion of Jesus in the place of a creed so shocking to our reason, and to our finer sensibilities.

Happily, however, there are circumstances which seem favourable to such an attempt. For, that natural sagacity which is the national characteristic of the Gentoos, the austere and abstemious life which they lead, the gentleness and serenity of their temper, their belief of a future state, and the idea of

one supreme God, which mixes even with the worship of their subordinate deities; all seem to afford a rational ground for us to expect their conversion.

But in what manner must we proceed in this interesting and most arduous project? Have not schemes of religious reformation been planned with plausible appearances in all ages; and in all have they not been foiled by real and stubborn difficulties? Are not the most approved reasonings, and the most glowing eloquence, defeated by ignorance or obstinacy in those who are to be taught? Has not the indiscretion or rashness of the teacher, in too many instances, entirely counteracted his benevolence, however sincere, and his activity, however unwearied? Let us not be discouraged by these general complaints, from taking a large and exact view of the particular question we are now called upon to examine.

The awful subjects of religion are to be treated differently in different circumstances. Some there are, whose minds are enlightened by science, enlarged by long and extensive intercourse with the world, and invigorated by habits of profound and intense meditation: the faith of such men will be unshaken, and their devotion will be ardent,

not from the aid of external forms, but by silent and secret adoration of the Deity, and by deep reflection upon the most extensive and abstracted truths of religion, both natural and revealed. But it would be visionary and dangerous to expect the same beneficial effects among persons of talents less cultivated, and of views less extensive. Experience tells us, that with the bulk of mankind some caution is necessary in the selection of topics adapted to their apprehension, and that much sagacity must be employed in the use of all those collateral and external expedients, which are to awaken their attention, and to direct it, when awakened, to proper objects. When therefore Christianity is attempted to be propagated among the inhabitants of the East, the attention of those to whom we preach it must be confined to doctrines systematically inculcated, and to a ritual punctually observed. We must not leave the great truths of salvation fluctuating with wild uncertainty in the minds of those who embrace them. To understandings which have recently emerged from the grossest superstition, we must not commit the task of *appointing for themselves* the modes of conciliating the divine favour by humble suppli-

cation and fervent thanksgiving. There is something attractive, we know, in the regularity and decency of prescribed forms; there is something highly instructive and persuasive in the plainness and precision of doctrines methodically proposed to the understanding. But in the *manner* of preparing these doctrines and these forms lies the chief difficulty we have to contend with: and it must be confessed, that Christian churches have often brought disgrace upon the general cause of Christianity, by an extravagant and undistinguishing attachment to their own peculiar tenets, and favourite ceremonies. They have supposed the followers of other systems equally able to comprehend what habit has familiarized, and equally disposed to adopt what conviction has endeared to themselves.

The efforts of missionaries, whom the policy or the zeal of the Romish church may have hitherto employed, have sometimes incurred the contempt of the Infidel, and sometimes provoked the indignation of the Philosopher. They have been marked rather by eagerness to multiply converts, than by ability to promote the real happiness of those that were converted. They appear to have substituted one species of superstition for

another ; to have darkened the understanding with error ; and to have poisoned the heart with bigotry.

But the advocates of sound and rational Christianity will not be exposed to these formidable imputations. Whatever specious and refined speculations may suggest, upon the natural pliancy of the human mind in receiving, and on its natural firmness in retaining, religious impressions, experience is our safest guide in dealing with the mass of mankind, who are prone to run into the most opposite extremes ; to be sometimes fickle, and sometimes obstinate ; sluggish in one moment, and, in the next, precipitate. Our regulations must therefore be adapted to the real *weaknesses* as well as capacities of those whom we would instruct. Some specific doctrines, as I before observed, must be taught, and some particular ceremonies must be recommended : we must interest the imagination, whilst we convince the judgment. But the task, arduous as it is, may be properly and effectually performed by a strict adherence to the genuine and characteristic principles of Protestantism. The leading, the essential, the most indubitable, and the most important doctrines of Christianity, must be proposed to the Eastern nations ex-

pressed in the clearest language, and supported by the most luminous arguments. When the errors and prejudices of those whom we instruct are, in some measure, subdued; and when their minds have been gradually prepared for a fuller delineation of evangelical truth, we may *then*, and then only, venture to propose those doctrines which are of a more mysterious and recondite nature. We must disclose them gradually, and with a spirit of the most enlarged toleration, to those persons, whose scruples cannot be entirely vanquished, and whose errors cannot be *at once* removed.

In overcoming the rooted and favourite prepossessions of the Gentoos and Mahometans, there, doubtless, will be room for the most accurate discrimination, and for the nicest delicacy. Their ignorance must be treated with tenderness, and their well-meant though mistaken piety will demand some portion even of reverence. Every truth we communicate must be assisted and recommended by the method in which it is to be communicated. It must carry along with it the brightest and most unequivocal evidence, not only of the firm conviction it has impressed upon the judgment of the teacher, but of the amiable effects which it has

wrought upon his temper, his actions, and his words.

I would have it understood, that no artifice, however plausible, no force, however indirect, should be employed by Protestant missionaries; and that my wish is rather to have Christianity taught as a true revelation, than to see it established suddenly upon the ruins of any false religion, which may have formerly prevailed. By these means we shall obtain all the advantages which the Romans enjoyed, by tolerating the customary worship and ancient theology of the nations whom they governed; and surely, from the superior excellence of the doctrines which we endeavour to disseminate, and by which we profess to be ourselves directed, we shall stand a fairer chance of making converts than a heathen missionary; and shall derive greater benefits from those who are converted, than paganism could confer on its sincerest and warmest votaries.

Similarity in religious persuasions certainly enlarges the sphere of social intercourse; facilitates the progress of civilization; and invigorates the operations of lawful government. This similarity it will be in our power to effect in some degree by judicious and temperate measures, in supporting the claims

of Christianity over the popular systems of belief that are now approved in the East. Let it, however, not be said, that tenets so opposite to each other cannot be taught with propriety, or even with safety, in the same country. Experience informs us, that a Mahometan can obey the same laws, and pursue the same civil employments, with the Gentoo: and doubtless, what is actually practised by the professors of opinions so romantic and discordant, may be yet more practicable under the mild and auspicious influence of the gospel. The energies of a firm and watchful government will repress the furious sallies of zeal; will protect all parties indiscriminately in their adherence to what they conceive to be truth; and at the same time will gradually prepare their minds for an impartial and serious discussion of such evidence, as may be brought to support the religion which really and solely is *the true*.

To the scheme here proposed, there, doubtless, is an objection, which a groveling and sordid spirit of covetousness is too apt to cherish. “At present, it may be said, the credulous Mahometan, and superstitious Gentoo, are unaspiring in their views, and tractable in their dispositions.

“ Their opinions do not disturb our tranquil-
“ lity, and their ceremonies only provoke
“ our contempt. But if they should here-
“ after see the fallacy of the one, and the
“ absurdity of the other; if they should
“ catch the manly and active spirit which
“ distinguishes the inhabitants of Christian
“ countries; if the bolder exercise of their
“ intellectual faculties should beget a juster
“ sense of their civil and political rights,
“ what may be the effects of such a revolu-
“ tion upon us! Actuated by nobler feel-
“ ings than they have hitherto experienced,
“ they will quickly exchange confidence for
“ distrust, and submission for resistance.
“ They will compel us, in our turn, to drag
“ the yoke of servitude; or they will drive
“ us from their shores as a race of merciless
“ ruffians, and insatiable plunderers.”

Now on the broad and solid principles of philanthropy and revelation, I see nothing in this popular objection which ought to shake our conviction, or to slacken our activity. A religion which enlivens the industry, and animates the courage of those who profess it; which awakens in them a more correct and more exquisite sense of their duties as men, and their importance as citizens; such a religion, I say, carries with it many

bright proofs of its utility and its truth. May we not then expect that the Philosopher will view the scheme I am proposing with fixed approbation, and that the Christian will embrace it with ardent fondness?

However we may attempt to varnish over the fact, the spirit of commerce will often seize, and often create opportunities of rapacity; and in regions very distant from the seat of empire, where the directions of law are frequently indistinct, and the restraints of shame are always feeble, the iron scourge of oppression will sometimes be lifted up against unprotected innocence, and conspicuous merit; against ignorance which cannot ascertain its privileges, and weakness which cannot assert them. But surely no plan of commerce can be lasting, and upon the whole advantageous; no form of government can be venerable or defensible; which excludes mutual trust, and does not provide for the mutual benefit of both parties, who are concerned with the one, or subject to the other. On the contrary, if we communicate the arts, the laws, and the religion of Europe to Eastern nations; if we shew them by our works, as well as by our words, that we are the disciples of Jesus; if we labour both for their spiritual and their temporal welfare;

there can be no reason to doubt of an ultimate and an adequate reward. They to whom we have given so sure an earnest of our sincerity and of our benevolence, will no longer view us with coldness as strangers, or with suspicion as foes. They will treat us, because they are *themselves treated*, as fellow-citizens and fellow-Christians; they will share with us in the common danger, and toil with us for the common interest; because they will consider themselves as partakers of the same blessings here, and heirs of the same promises hereafter.

Such measures, it is true, may prevent individuals from amassing exorbitant wealth, from revelling in luxurious voluptuousness, and from grasping at enormous dominion. But such measures, even if they tend to the removal of these outrageous evils *alone*, are not unworthy of our regard; and they deserve a yet larger share of our attention, if, in consequence of our honest and strenuous endeavours to execute them, the general harmony of the Europeans and Orientals would be more effectually secured, and the general happiness of both promoted more successfully.

Zealous in the recommendation of this purpose, I regard not the cold and mistaken

policy of some, who would separate our religious from our civil interests. This country has ever boasted with equal pride and justice the purity of its worship, and the excellence of its government. The same happy æra gave birth to each : out of the ashes of despotism and superstition they both arose ; and if they fall, they will fall together. Narrow therefore and false is that philanthropy, which pretends to be solicitous for the rights and liberties of mankind, while for their eternal welfare it employs no measures, and even professedly feels no concern.

In what better purpose can a wise and virtuous nation be employed, than in propagating its religion, wheresoever its laws are obeyed ? If it seeks to protect, and not to impoverish ; if it desires to govern, and not to enslave ; it will be equally intent to diffuse among its subjects the rights of freedom, and the privileges of Christianity.

And at what period in the history of our empire could this attempt be made, with a more favourable prospect of success, than at present ? The extreme importance of Indian wealth to our commerce, and the growing connection between the principles of that commerce, and of the government which is

to protect it, have awakened the attention of the legislature to subjects equally extensive and interesting. The code which directs the belief and influences the actions of the Hindoos, has been lately translated into the vernacular language, and submitted to the inspection of public curiosity. Hence we are enabled to trace the long and close connection that subsists between the religious and civil laws of the Hindoos. We can discern what errors are almost impregnable to argument, and what may be overcome by cautious and well-directed opposition. We see in their full magnitude the futility of their traditions, and the absurdity of their ceremonies. We can mark the slow and imperfect progress of civilization and science; and should therefore be careful to make their future progress in religious knowledge keep a due proportion to those improvements, in the attainment of which we are preparing to assist them in social life. We cannot indeed so far adopt the policy of the Romans as to naturalize^a any part of their mythology, because *all* the parts of it are in *all respects* incompatible with our own religion. But we may gradually lessen their reverence for their sacred records, by exercising their faith

^a See Halhed's Preface to the Code of Gentoo Laws.

on *other* more undoubted interpositions of the Deity. When European customs have been in some degree introduced among the Hindoos, we shall find them less solicitous for the observance of Eastern ceremonies. When European science has dawned upon their minds, we may see them less tenacious of their old opinions. The auspicious effects of our laws will create some kind of prejudice in favour of our religion; and when they find it so perfectly exempt from the sanguinary and intolerant spirit of Mahometism, they may by degrees be brought to listen to the evidences by which it is supported, and the sanctions by which it is enforced. For incorporating their laws with our own, we have formed a plan, the completion of which is likely to do honour to our national policy and national magnanimity. Yet if we mean only to exempt the inhabitants of the East from temporary inconvenience and oppression; if we do not intend to exalt them gradually in the scale of social creatures; if we exert no endeavours for enlarging the sphere of their future speculation and *moral improvement*, we shall leave the work shamefully imperfect; and substitute, I fear, selfish cunning for genuine and enlarged wisdom. It would, indeed, be

a refined species of mockery to hold out the blessings of a free and equitable government, to those who are too ignorant to understand, and too languid to enjoy them.

Such is the favourable posture of affairs in the East, and such the assistance which our political systems may there give to the propagation of religious truth. If we turn our eyes towards ourselves, we shall perceive many striking discriminations of the present age, which, under judicious direction, may not be disadvantageous to the cause of Christianity. A spirit of adventure is gone forth among us ; a spirit of experiment : it has infected our philosophy, our religion, and our politics. It has perplexed vulgar minds in the mazes of error and absurdity, and hurried away men of the brightest faculties into the dangerous extremes of subtlety and refinement.

Let us apply this restless principle to a labour of more general importance, and more obvious utility : let us present a nobler scheme for its contemplation, and a worthier object for its exertions. No longer busied in fruitless projects, and groundless theories, let us apply it, where it will be attended with practical advantage, in converting and enlightening our colonies in the East.

Gratitude, compassion, patriotism, and above all, the yet nobler principle of Christian charity, call loudly on us to communicate to others the blessings which we ourselves enjoy ; to publish the glad tidings of salvation among those nations that now sit in darkness, aliens from Christ, and strangers to the covenant of grace : and while we declare to the savage of America the joys and glories of everlasting life, let us lead also the disciple of Brama, and the follower of Mahomet, from the error of their ways, into the glorious light of the Gospel of peace.

To Omniscience only are known the times and the seasons. We cannot thwart the real purposes of Heaven by deliberate perverseness or preposterous diligence. But the wish to forward them is always meritorious ; the attempt, if conducted with prudence and with firmness, will procure us some reward ; and surely, if in the moral government of the world the Deity conveys temporal happiness by the agency of his creatures, that agency becomes more splendid and more important, when it is wisely and generously employed in promoting their eternal welfare. Though our powers and our efforts, in carrying on the scheme I am now recommending to you into execution, should be for a time

ineffectual, the day will assuredly come, when others shall accomplish what we may attempt in vain; when all the religions of the earth shall be changed into the worship of the one true God; when not only the Mahometan and Hindoo, but every nation and every kindred shall bow the knee at the name of Jesus; and when Christian charity, like its almighty Author, shall finally subdue all things unto itself.

NOTES.

NOTES.

NOTES AND AUTHORITIES.

N. B. *It having been suggested by the Author's friends, that the Lectures, as read from the pulpit, were too diffuse, and might with great propriety be abridged in the publication; he has availed himself of this judicious opinion, partly by retrenching many superfluities, and partly by printing amongst the Notes the substance of some digressions.*

P. 42. l. 3. *The fact we cannot dispute, where we are utterly unable to assign the final cause.]* There is nothing more mysterious in this fact, than in many other occurrences and dispensations of divine Providence: and it reflects no more dishonour on the moral attributes of the Deity than other evils that infinite Wisdom daily permits to take place in the world. Ignorant minds are apt to be biassed by outward events, and often decide on the merits of a cause by the success which attends it, abstractedly from those considerations which a wise man will always take into the account, in order to determine on the nature of that success, its means, and its end. In the case of particular persons this false mode of reasoning is very common. We find it in the mouth of Bildad, when he would infer the displeasure of God against the patriarch of Uz from the calamities which had befallen him. *If thou wert pure and upright, surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.* Cæcilius, in his celebrated dispute with

Octavius, could not conceive that the God, "the solitary God," of the Jews, as he denominates him, could be Almighty, and yet suffer his people to remain so long in captivity. This is the fallacious conclusion of men, who judge of the divine conduct by the partial rules of human judgment and experience; and think God to be such a one as themselves; governed by the same motives, and possessed of the same affections; limited in his views, and partial in his attachments. The providence of God respecting this people had an object in view of a larger extent and consequence than their particular fortunes: and the prosperity and adversity of their church and state were but means employed by infinite Wisdom to produce events of a more universal importance.

P. 44. l. 4. *Baal*] Baal, the Syrian idol, for a time seems to have engrossed the devotions and sacrifices of the apostate Israelites, after Ahab had married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal the king of the Zidonians. [1 Kings xvi. 30.] The influence of this pernicious example was so extensive and apparent, that the prophet Elijah considered himself as single in resisting it, and a solitary worshipper of the true God. He was indeed mistaken: but the degeneracy must have been almost universal, to have occasioned the exclamation which he made; and those whom God had preserved from the idolatrous contagion of the times, certainly bore but a very small proportion to the bulk of the people, who were infected with the most inveterate species of it. 1 Kings xix. 14, 18.

Ibid. l. 27. *Nor did the introduction of Christianity into the world, &c.*] The influence of the gospel is of a moral nature. It does not break in on the constitution of the human mind by any necessitating and irresistible power. Men are left to judge of its nature and qualities by the common lights of the understanding; and it is in the power of the will to resist its evidence. If the

faculties were controlled by its force, there could be no merit in yielding to its influence. It would cease to be a moral means of conversion, if it left no exercise for the judgment, and no choice for the will. As so much depends on a man's own conduct, in order to constitute him a moral agent, a subject of rewards and punishments, we cannot conceive any scheme that would necessarily prevent the admission, and in some situations the prevalence of error, without a total alteration in the plan of moral government. The faculties that may be employed to a good purpose, are liable to be perverted to a bad one. Divine wisdom from time to time corrects and restrains the abuses that arise from their mismanagement: but to prevent them altogether, would require such a perpetual intervention of a miraculous power, and such a constant bias irresistibly preponderating over the mind, as would destroy the very design of the gospel, which is intended to produce a voluntary service by moral motives; and not a necessary effect by a constraining and irresistible impulse.

P. 46. l. 19. *Thus he foretold; and the event justified the prediction.*] That the church was even in the earliest periods infested with heresies of the most pernicious kind, cannot be denied. The apostles themselves complain of sectaries who attempted to seduce the ignorant and unwary by various artifices and impositions, suited to the various humours and prejudices of those whom it was their aim to pervert. The primitive fathers found the subjects of complaint and remonstrance still more numerous and alarming: and they increased with the increasing fortunes of the church. The heretics were so numerous, and the tenets they laboured to disseminate were so very prejudicial to the interests of the gospel in the time of Justin Martyr, that he composed a set treatise in answer to them, which unfortunately has shared the fate of many other excellent treatises, the names of which have only escaped the wreck of time.

[*Mosheim, vol. ii. p. 152, 153.*] The elaborate work of Irenæus experienced a better fate. It is a melancholy monument of the perverseness of the human understanding, when it suffers itself to be deluded by novelties, and, instead of following the *form of sound words* delivered in the holy scriptures, proudly pursues its own inventions with only fancy for its guide. But the early prevalence of error, so far from diminishing the credit of the gospel, tends rather to establish its authority; as it confirms the predictions of that divine oracle by whom it was delivered to the world.

P. 47. l. 28. *It appears then, as well from experience that error often does, &c.*] Errors must arise as long as men are free. Nor do they only arise from the moral constitution of free agents; but from the particular designation of divine Providence. God makes use of evil instruments to effect a good purpose. He puts such restraints on wicked and erroneous men; so overrules their conduct, so counteracts and checks their proceedings, that they may not infringe on the standing laws of his kingdom, and derange the general plan of his providence. As *individuals* they are criminal; but considered in a more extensive light, their conduct is ultimately beneficial. We find that errors were permitted under the Mosaic institution for the same reason that the Apostle alleges for their permission under the Christian. Compare Deut. xiii. 1, &c. with 1 Cor. ii. 19.

P. 52. l. 9. *Among the bishops, &c.*] The want even of a knowledge of the common rudiments of literature was so general among the higher ecclesiastics of those times, that it was scarcely deemed disgraceful to acknowledge it. In the acts of the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, many examples occur, where subscriptions are to be found in this form: *I, such an one, have subscribed by the hand of such an one, because I cannot write. And such a bishop having said that he could not write, I whose name is underwritten have subscribed for him.*

P. 55. l. 17. *The very essence of Christianity was lost, &c.]* No representation can convey stronger ideas of the melancholy state of religion in the 7th century, than the description of the character of a good Christian as drawn at that period by St. Eligius, or Eloi, bishop of Noyon.

“ Bonus Christianus est qui ad ecclesiam frequenter
 “ venit, et oblationem, quæ in altari Deo offeratur, ex-
 “ hibet; qui de fructibus suis non gustat, nisi prius
 “ Deo aliquid offerat; qui quoties sanctæ solennitates
 “ adveniunt, ante dies plures castitatem etiam cum pro-
 “ pria uxore custodit, ut segura conscientia Domini al-
 “ tare accedere possit; qui postremo symbolum, vel ora-
 “ tionem dominicam memoriter tenet. Redimite animas
 “ vestras de pœna dum habetis in potestate remedia;
 “ oblationes et decimas ecclesiis afferte; luminaria sanc-
 “ tis locis, juxta quod habetis, exhibete; ad ecclesiam
 “ quoque frequentius convenite; sanctorum patrocinia
 “ humiliter expetite: quod si observaveritis, securi in
 “ die judicii ante tribunal æterni judicis venientes,
 “ dicetis, Da, Domine, quia dedimus.” Mosh. vol. ii.
 p. 22.

P. 56. l. 14. *Even the fancied remains of that cross]* A veneration for the cross very early possessed the minds of the primitive Christians; and was afterwards carried into all the extremes of absurd and puerile superstition. Its allegorical reference was magnified into a real virtue: and what the apostles spoke of under the form of a metaphorical symbol, became in time an object of devotion, and was made use of as an actual charm.

Ibid. l. 16. *The images of the saints who had laboured to disseminate]* The earlier Christians reprobated every species of image-worship in the strongest language; and some of them employed the force of ridicule to great advantage in order to expose its absurdity. When the Empress Constantia desired Eusebius to send her the image of Jesus Christ, he expostulated with her on the

impropriety and absurdity of her requisition in the following very striking words: "What kind of image of Christ does your imperial Majesty wish to have conveyed to you? Is it the image of his real and immutable nature? or is it that which he assumed for our sakes, when he was veiled in the form of a servant? With respect to the form of God, I presume you are not to learn, that *no man hath known the Son, but the Father; neither hath any man known the Father, but the Son; and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* But you ask for the image of Christ when he appeared in human form, clothed in a body similar to our own. Let me inform you, that that body is now blended with the glory of Deity; and all that was mortal in it is absorbed in life."

P. 60. l. 11. *It of course admitted an almost endless variety of religious opinions.*] Vid. Sharestani apud Poc. Specim. Hist. Arabum, p. 136.

Ibid. l. 19. *Many of them escaped hither, as to a place of refuge from the dreadful calamities, which the just vengeance of God inflicted on their nation.*] Vid. Millii Dissert. de Mohammedismo ante Mohammedem, p. 43.

Ibid. l. 23. *Christianity had also made a very considerable progress among some of the tribes of Arabia, particularly that sect which was distinguished by the title of Jacobites*] 'Cui Christianorum sectæ potissimum addicti erant Arabes in Christum credentes, ex hoc ipso authore nostro * discimus, qui causam quod Mondarus, Arabum rex, Græcis bellum intulerit, hanc assignat, quod Imperator Justinianus eos male tractaret qui unam in Christo naturam assererent, cum eo tempore qui inter Arabes erant Christiani, كانوا يعتقدون اعتقاد البعاقبة, Jacobitarum confessionem amplecterentur †." The Jacobites took their denomination from one Jacob, a Sy-

* Abu'l Pharajio.

† Specim. Hist. Arab. p. 137.

rian †, who began to disseminate his doctrines in the East about the close of the sixth century. His sect are sometimes distinguished by the name of Monophysites, the progeny of the Eutychians, who asserted the *single nature* of Christ in opposition to the orthodox, who maintained that his nature was twofold, human and divine. The Nestorians, in avoiding this error, ran into the contrary extreme. In order to support his twofold nature, they also divided the *person* of Christ into two. The Athanasians guard their creed against both these errors, by maintaining that Christ is in *nature two*, but in *person one*; and illustrate the union by that of the soul and body in the human constitution. The plea of difficulty, and even incomprehensibility, may be urged in one case as well as in another. The difficulty in the former is greater, because the subject is of a higher degree. But if man is a mystery to man, *can we by searching find out God?*

P. 61. l. 3. *Idolatry*] For a full and particular account of the various objects which shared the devotions of the idolatrous Arabs, see Poc. Spec. p. 89, &c. Sale's Prelim. Disc. edit. 4to. p. 17. Hottinger, Hist. Orient. p. 228, &c.

Ibid. l. 4. *The predominant species appears to have been that of the Sabians*] See Poc. Specim. p. 138—143. Sale's Prelim. Disc. p. 14. Those who are desirous of obtaining a more exact knowledge of the Sabian principles and worship, may consult Hyde, Rel. vet. Pers. p. 128. D'Herbelot, Bibl. p. 726. Hottinger, Hist. Oriental. lib. i. c. viii. Prideaux, Connect. part i. b. 3.

Ibid. l. 15. *The religion of the Magi had likewise found its way, and obtained an establishment among some of their*

† والبعاقة فرقة يعقوب السوري ويسمي البرادعي ادعت
ان المسيح عليه السلام صيرة الاتحاد طبيعة واحدة واقنوم
واحد
Ahmed Ebn Edris.

tribes.] See Poc. Spec. p. 146. Every important particular concerning this religion has been elaborately investigated, and clearly explained by the learned Hyde in his Rel. vet. Pers. and also by Prideaux, Connect. part i. b. 4.

P. 62. l. 18. *With the Jew he maintained the inspiration of Moses*] Sale's Koran, p. 407. edit. 4to.

Ibid. l. 20. *With the Christian he admitted the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and the truth of the gospel*] Koran, p. 30, 35, 41. Reland. de Relig. Moham. lib. i. c. 4. Elmacin, Hist. Sarac. p. 3.

Ibid. l. 23. *He even attempted to found his own pretensions on the preceding revelations of Moses and Christ*] Koran, p. 174, 133, 449.

Ibid. l. 26. *That he was sent to purify a religion, which originally came down from heaven*] Vid. Millii Dissert. de Mohammedismo, &c. p. 5, 6.

P. 63. l. 2. *To close the seal of prophecy*] Vid. Hottinger, Hist. Oriental. p. 418.

Ibid. l. 21. *The art of writing had been known and practised by their countryman Job, and by the tribe of Hamyar, &c.*] The Hamyaritic character was probably of very high antiquity. It was intricate and perplexed, making no regular distinction betwixt the different letters, from whence perhaps it had the name of *المسناد* *Al Mosnad*. Moramer Ebn Morra is said to have been the inventor of the Arabic character, not many years before the birth of Mahomet. The letters invented by Moramer were, however, rude and imperfect, similar to, or perhaps the same with those which are called Cufic, and which are often found on ancient monuments in the East. The elegant and beautiful character now in use amongst the Arabs was formed from the invention of Moramer, by Ebn Moklah, almost 300 years after Mahomet, and finally brought to perfection by Ali Ebn Bowab in the following century. Vid. Ebn Chalican apud Poc. Spec. p. 155—159.

P. 63. l. 25. *The rest of the Arabs were totally unacquainted with this useful art*] Ebn Chalikan asserts, that at the first publication of the Koran, there could not be found in the whole country of Yemen one single person who could read or write Arabic. Vid. Poc. Specim. p. 156.

Ibid. l. 27. *Those of Mecca in particular, were peculiarly distinguished as ignorant and illiterate, even to a proverb*] The inhabitants of Mecca were called *الاميون*, the illiterate, in opposition to those of Medina, who from their acquaintance with the arts of reading and writing, not less than from their being in possession of a written system of religion, were distinguished by the title of *اهل الكتاب*, the people of the book*.

Medina was principally inhabited by Jews and Christians: and hence Mahomet in his Koran frequently applies this title of *اهل الكتاب*, to Jews and Christians in general. See Koran, p. 71, 158, &c.

P. 64. l. 14. *But to the profound researches of philosophy, and the laboured deductions of reason, they were of necessity entire strangers*] *واما علم الفلسفة فلم يمنحهم الله شيئا منه* [Verum quod ad philosophiæ scientiam, nihil ejus admodum concesserat illis Deus, nec eos ad hæc studia idoneos fecerat.] *Abu'l Phar. Hist. Dyn.* 161.

Ibid. l. 23. *Many of them absolutely denied the possibility of a future state of existence*] There were some amongst the Arabs who denied both the creation of the world, and a future resurrection; ascribing the origin of the universe to what they call nature, and referring its final dissolution to the effect of time. Others, though they admitted a creation, yet totally rejected every idea

* الفرقتان المتقابلتان قبل المبعث هم اهل الكتاب والاميون والامي من لا يعرف الكتبة فكانت اليهود والنصارى بالمدينة والاميون بمكة
Sharestani.

of a resurrection of the dead. Vid. Sharestan. apud. Poc. Spec. p. 134.

P. 65. l. 6. *Should again be called into existence*] Vid. Poc. Specim. ubi supra. Millii Dissert. i. de Moham. p. 14.

Ibid. l. 23. *And believed that even the animals, &c.*] Pocock, on the authority of Al Jauhari, Ebno'l Athir, Sharestani, and other Arabic authors, relates a singular custom which prevailed among some of the Arabians, of tying a camel over the grave of the deceased, where it was left to perish without food; lest its master should suffer the disgrace of walking on foot in another world*.

P. 66. l. 24. *Gardens fairer, &c.*] See Koran, p. 204, 410, 433.

P. 69. l. 27. *Looking forward with anxious expectation to the joys of Paradise, &c.*] Vid. Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moham. p. 43.

P. 70. l. 9. *The fellow-citizens of the impostor, &c.*] Vid. Elmacin. Hist. Saracen. p. 3.

Ibid. l. 20. *The submission of the holy city*] Mecca opened her gates to Mahomet in the eighth year of the Hejra. See Abu'l Feda, p. 102. 106. Elmacin. p. 8.

Ibid. l. 23. *The senseless objects of Arabian devotion*] Mahomet found no less than 360 idols round the Caaba, all of which he destroyed†.

P. 71. l. 14. *No longer scrupled to assume the ensigns of temporal as well as spiritual dominion*] Elmacin. p. 7.

* وكان فيهم من يقول بالمعاد ويعتقد ان من نحررت
ناقته على قبوة حشر راكبا ومن لم يفعل ذلك حشر
ماشيا

† دخل النبي صلعم مكة يوم فتح وحول البيت
صتور وثلثمائة نصب فجعل يطعنهما بعود في يده فيقول
جاء الحق فزهق الباطل &c. Al-Bochari, in Sonna.

P. 71. l. 18. *The troops of the imperial prophet]* Vid. Abu'l Fed. p. 111.

Ibid. l. 24. *The streets of Medina were crowded with ambassadors]* From the number of these embassies, this year was called سنة الوفود *annus legationum* *.

P. 72. l. 3. *And thus was his empire at length firmly established throughout the several provinces of Arabia]* ثم دخلت سنة عشر ورسول الله صلعم بالمدينة وجاته وفود العرب قاطبة ودخل الناس في الدين افوجا— واسلم اهل اليمن وملوك حمير.

‘ Deinde cœpit annus Hegiræ decimus.

‘ Cum esset Apostolus Dei Medinæ, venerunt ad eum
‘ legationes ex universa Arabia; et homines undique in
‘ religionem intraverunt turmatim. Et Islamismum am-
‘ plexi sunt incolæ Arabiæ felicis, et reges Hamyar.’
Abu'l Feda.

Ibid. l. 26. *Little remained to be done, but to pursue the path which he had traced]* At this critical period the assassination of one, and the decisive overthrow of another, of the competitors of Mahomet, who had with equal ambition, though with inferior abilities, aspired to the same preeminence, gave new strength and authority to the infant government.

Al-Aswad † in the space of four months had rendered himself extremely formidable, and subdued the greater part of Yemen, besides other provinces, when he was assassinated by the contrivance of Mahomet, on the very day before the death of that impostor.

Mosailama ‡, called by the Mahometans ‘ the lying

* قال ابو الربيع لم تزل الوفود تغد على النبي صلعم منذ اظهر الله دينه وقهر اعداءه ولكن انبعث جماهيرهم الي ذلك انما كان بعد فتح مكة ومعظمه في سنة تسع ولذلك كانت تسمى سنة الوفود. *Abu'l Rabi.*

† Abu'l Fed. Cap. lxxiii.

‡ Idem in Vita Abu-Becri.

‘Mosailama,’ had once professed the religion of Mahomet; but afterwards apostatising, assumed the character of prophet himself, and collected a very numerous body of followers, when his party was totally routed by the Mahometan army under the command of Chaled Ebno’l Walid, and himself with 10000 of his troops put to the sword. This signal victory was obtained in the first year of the reign of Abu Becr, the successor of Mahomet.

Taliha*, another competitor of Mahomet, having raised a considerable party, was routed and put to flight by the same commander; but afterwards returned to his allegiance in the reign of Omar, the second Caliph.

These facts are of singular importance, as they tend much to lessen our wonder at the success of Mahomet, among his own countrymen at least, by proving how easily the Arabians admitted, and how zealously they defended, the groundless claims of every daring impostor.

P. 80. l. 23. *By this authority every question of life and of property is finally decided*] During the first century of Mahometism, the followers of the prophet, possessed of little fixed property, and engaged solely in the occupations of war, found in the words and letter of the Koran a law fully adequate to the purpose of regulating all their civil affairs. But when their numbers were considerably increased, when their dominion was established over opulent and extensive kingdoms, and when the arts of peace and the employments of commerce had succeeded to the tumult of war, the institutions contained in the mere letter of their law were probably too vague and too general, to preserve the order and well-being of civil society. It was then that commentators arose, whose object it was to supply the defects, without derogating from the authority of the original law; or alienating any part of that implicit obedience, to which

* Elmacin, *Hist. Saracen.* p. 16,

it was entitled. With this view numberless volumes have been composed, on the most respectable of which every decision in the Mahometan courts is founded. All of these, however, professedly derive their sole force and claim to respect from the venerable and infallible authority of the Koran.

P. 82. l. 16. *By the ablest commentators]* See this prophecy particularly explained in Mede, Newton on the Prophecies, Vol. III. p. 98, &c. Bagot's Warb. Lectures, p. 290. and Hallifax's Warb. Lect. p. 318.

P. 86. l. 15. *It is even necessary to acknowledge, that in the finger of God we find the only adequate, and therefore the real and illustrious cause.]* We are told by a very acute, but mischievous writer of Metaphysics*, that from a finite effect we can only infer a finite cause. Now, if this subtlety be employed to disprove the divine original of the gospel, we contend against the Deist, that it bears equally hard against the evidences of natural religion, and cannot therefore be consistently employed by him who admits those evidences: and to the Atheist we reply, that it does not, when fairly examined, answer the purpose for which he would employ it. The Being, from whom all things derive their existence, may be in his attributes infinite, though his works, in which subsist the relations of cause and effect, be finite. By this distinction we secure the honour of the divine nature: and, carrying on the same distinction to the introduction and establishment of the gospel, we first shew, that it is not of human original, because all efforts of human agency are unequal to the effect; and we then assert, that every rule of just reasoning authorizes us to admit the divine agency, which is equal. If indeed our enemies be persuaded, that the unaided power of man could not have established the gospel, we shall find little difficulty in conquering the arguments which lead us to

* Hume's Essays, Vol. II. p. 153. edit. 1764.

have recourse to any intermediate cause, that falls short of divine interposition.

P. 88. l. 24. *The promise of a Redeemer, &c.*] It is evident from several passages in the New Testament, that the Jews were in expectation of the Messiah at the time of Christ's appearance. The woman of Samaria, though of a schismatical church, yet deriving her knowledge from the same source of divine prophecy, said to Jesus, *I know that the Messiah cometh, &c.* John iv. 25. In Luke iii. 15. we are informed, that the preaching of John was of so divine a nature, that *all men mused in their hearts whether he was the Christ or not.* And when Jesus had performed a variety of miracles, which evidently bespoke a divine interposition, this actual question was proposed — *When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?* John vii. 31. Whether therefore the Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah, or rejected him under this character, it is evident that they were in expectation of a person who should sustain the office. And indeed the confirmation, which he gave to his claim to this superior and distinguishing title, was so full and clear, that it is said in the 40th and 41st verses of the fore-cited chapter, *that many of the people declared of a truth, This is that prophet: others said, This is the Christ.* The message of the Jews by the Priests and Levites to John, *Art thou the Christ?* is a sufficient proof of the expectation which generally prevailed of the advent of a divine person, sustaining this character. John i. 19. *The coming of the Messiah,* made an express article of the Jewish faith, as we are informed by Maimonides and others of that church: and the denial of it was deemed a dangerous heresy, and a virtual renunciation of the authority and truth of the law of Moses.

P. 105, &c. Here it would not be difficult to multiply authorities to support what has been advanced in this and the following pages respecting the Gentile Philosophy; but as the subject is familiar to scholars, and has

been often ably and fully discussed, I purposely forbear entering into particulars, and refer my readers in general to Brucker's *Historia Philosophiæ*.

P. 134. l. 10. *Abject credulity of the multitudes whom he deceived*] The warm imagination and enthusiastic zeal of Arabian authors has not suffered the birth, the infancy, and the youth of their prophet to remain undistinguished by many of those prodigies, and many of those presages of his future greatness, with which superstition is ever ready to adorn the history of its heroes.

Even the learned and sensible Abu'l Feda has related at large several of those prodigies which are said to have announced the birth of the infant prophet to the world, together with their explanation by Satih, a famous diviner of those days. ذكر الحافظ لما كانت الليلة التي ولد

فيها رسول الله صلعم ارتجس ايوان كسري وسقطت منه اربع عشر شرفة وخمدت نيران فارس ولم تخمد قبل ذلك بالالف عام وغاضت بحيرة ساوة وراي الموبذان وهو قاضي الفرس في منامه ابلا صعبا يقود خيلا عربا قد قطعت دجلة وانتشرت في بلادها فلما اصبح كسري اغرعه ذلك واجتمع بموبذان فقص عليه ما راي فقال كسري اي شي يكون هذا فقال الموبذان وكان عالما يكون حدث من جهة

العرب امر Abu'l Feda.

Ibid. l. 13. *The circumstances which attended the earlier years of Mahomet, &c.*] Abdollah the father of Mahomet died, according to some authors, when he was two months old. Five camels and an Ethiopian female slave comprised the whole of his property, which remained for the support of his widow and orphan son.

جميع ما خلفه عبد الله خمسة اجمال وجراية حبشية

اسمها بركة Abu'l Feda.

See also *Abu'l Faraj. de Moribus Arab. p. 6.*

Ibid. l. 17. *Though descended from the most honourable tribe of Arabia*] The tribe of Koreish, in which Mahomet

was born and educated, was the most illustrious of all the tribes of Arabs; and was at that time distinguished for its zeal for religion. It had the custody of the temple of Mecca, from whence it was called **اهل الله**: they were also called **الحمس**. In order to ingratiate himself with them, and to induce them the more readily to embrace his religion, Mahomet transferred many of their institutions into his new system. This is asserted by the Arabian historians themselves: thus Abu'l Feda — **وكانت الجاهلية تفعل اشيا جلت شريعة الاسلام** —

P. 136. l. 10. *During his travels into the neighbouring nations, &c.* **قلما بلغها [خديجة] صدق رسول الله صلعم فماتت عرضت عليه الخروج في تجارتها الي الشام مع غلام لها يقال لها ميسرة فاجاب الي ذلك وخرج رسول الله صلعم حتى قدم الشام ومعه ميسرة** *Abu'l Feda.*

Ibid. l. 25. *But when a sudden and unexpected change of fortune had raised him from poverty and dependence to opulence*] Mahomet in the 25th year of his age was raised to an equality with the richest citizens of Mecca by his marriage with an opulent widow, whose mercantile affairs he had conducted in Syria highly to her satisfaction. This event may justly be considered as the foundation of all the future fortune of Mahomet: who, sensible of the advantages he had derived from the favour of Chadijah, is said to have remained strictly faithful to her during the whole of her life; and after her death to have ever spoken of her in terms of the warmest and most grateful respect. **ولما كمل له من العمر**

خمس وعشرون سنة عرضت عليه امرأة ذات شرف وبسار اسمها خديجة ان يخرج بمالها تاجرا الي الشام وتعطيه افضل ما تعطي غيره فاجابها الي ذلك وخرج ثم رغبت فيه وعرضت نفسها عليه فتزوجها وعمرها يومئذ اربعون سنة واقامت معه الي ان توفت بمكة اثنتين وعشرين سنة *Abu'l Pharaj.*

P. 137. l. 17. *In a lonely cave, in the recesses of Mount Hara, he shunned the society of men]* فلما كانت سنة مبعثه
خرج الي حرا في رمضان للمجاورة

P. 139. l. 17. *The belief of one only supreme God]* The former part of that well-known sentence, which now constitutes the Mahometan confession of faith, لا اله الا الله, *there is no God but God*, is said to have been in use amongst the ancient Arabs long before the time of Mahomet, and was expressive of their belief in the unity of the supreme Being. Vid. Mill. de Mohammedismo ante Moham. p. 11.

P. 143. l. 5. *The character of Mahomet, according to eastern historians, had been hitherto preserved unblemished, &c.]* وشب رسول الله صلعم حتي بلغ وكان اعظم الناس مروءة وحلما واحسنهم جوابا واصدقهم حديثا واعظمهم امانا وابعدهم عن الفحش حتي صار اسمه الاميون لما جمع الله فيه من الامور الصالحة
Abu'l Feda.

Ibid. l. 28. *When the time which he had chosen to announce his mission approached]* Mahomet was forty years old when he assumed the prophetic character; he probably delayed the commencement of his imposture to so late a period, not merely with a view of more effectually maturing his ambitious projects, but also in compliance with an opinion which seems to have become proverbial amongst the Arabs, that a prophet was never commissioned by God before he attained his fortieth year:

ان لم يبعث نبيا الا بعد اربعين سنين

P. 144. l. 1. *According to the expression of Abu'l Feda]*

اذا كانت البلة التي اكرمها الله تعالى

Ibid. l. 20. *After three years]* وكانت دعوة رسول الله

صلعم الي الاسلام سرا ثلاث سنين ثم بعدها امر الله رسوله
بإظهار الدعوة
Abu'l Feda.

P. 146. l. 9. *Unshaken in his purposes, and regardless of the dangers and difficulties that surrounded him]*

فَظَن رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَعَمَ عَمِي لَوْ وَضَعُوا الشَّمْسُ فِي يَمِينِي وَالْقَمَرُ فِي شِمَالِي مَا تَرَكْتُ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ ۖ ثُمَّ اسْتَمَرَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ
Abu'l Feda.

P. 147. l. 4. *Compelled, however, to escape by a precipitate flight*] From this flight of their prophet, the famous æra of the Mahometans derives its beginning and its name: the word *Hejra* in the Arabic language signifies *a flight*.

P. 148. l. 9. *Resemble the irregular exploits of a robber, &c.*] See *Abu'l Feda*, p. 55.

P. 149. l. 13. *Dismissing thousands of his captives*] See *Ibid.* p. 118.

Ibid. l. 19. *Imbruing his hands in the blood of the conquered*] Mahomet at one time beheaded near 700 Koraidhites, his prisoners, under the most aggravating circumstances of cruelty. The command was not issued in the heat of action, when his passions were inflamed by the opposition which had been made to his power; but after his return to Medina, after a considerable space had elapsed, and given time for his resentment to cool, and for the feelings of humanity to exert their influence in his breast. See *Abu'l Feda*, p. 79.

The Deity is afterwards introduced in the Koran giving the sanction of his approbation to this disgraceful act of savage barbarity.—“A part of them ye slew, “and a part of them ye made captives; and God hath “caused you to inherit their land, and their houses, and “their wealth.” Chap. xxxiii.

P. 150. l. 6. *Stained with the recent slaughter of a friend, a brother, or a parent*] The situation of the unfortunate sufferer on this occasion, is exactly similar to that of Priam, so pathetically described by Homer.

Τοὺς δ' ἔλαθ' εἰσελθὼν Πρίαμος μέγας, ἄγχι δ' ἄρα σταῖς,
 Χερσὶν Ἀχιλλῆος λάβε γούνατα, καὶ κύσε χεῖρας
 Δεινὰς, ἀνδροφόνους, αἳ οἱ πολέας κτάνον υἷας.

Iliad. Ω. l. 477.

P. 152. l. 18. *But the boundless lust of Mahomet, &c.*]

The impostor limited his followers to the number of four wives, [See Koran, ch. iv.] whilst he himself, according to Abu'l Feda, had no less than fifteen, besides concubines. But this was a peculiar privilege founded on the express words of God himself. “ O prophet, we have
 “ allowed thee thy wives, unto whom thou hast given
 “ their dower, and also the slaves which thy right hand
 “ possesseth, of the booty which God hath granted thee;
 “ and the daughters of thy uncle, and the daughters of
 “ thy aunts, both on thy father’s side, and on thy mother’s side, who have fled with thee from Mecca; and
 “ any other believing woman, if she give herself unto
 “ the prophet: in case the prophet desireth to take her
 “ to wife. This is a peculiar privilege granted unto thee,
 “ above the rest of the true believers.” Kor. ch. xxxiii.

P. 155. l. 21. *Now selecting the temple of Jerusalem, and now that of Mecca.*] See *Abu'l Fed.* p. 54.

P. 156. l. 4. *We see his steps every where marked with blood and desolation*] The impetuous courage of Mahomet, and the cruelty and devastation with which the progress of his imposture was attended, reminds us of the character which the Roman poet has given of Cæsar. Nothing surely can be more descriptive of the Arabian conqueror than the following lines.

“ Acer et indomitus, quo spes, quoque ira vocasset,

“ Ferre manum, et nunquam temerando parcere ferro:

“ Successus urgere suos——

——“ Impellens, quicquid sibi summa petenti

“ Obstaret; gaudensque viam fecisse ruina.”

Lucan, lib. i. l. 146.

P. 157. l. 6. *Precluded from the perusal of books and the use of writing*] In the xxixth chapter of the Koran, Mahomet introduces God as thus addressing him: “ Thou
 “ couldest not read any book before this; neither could-
 “ est thou write it with thy right hand: for then had
 “ the gainsayers justly doubted of the divine original
 “ thereof.” Hence his followers, instead of being ashamed

of this pretended ignorance of their master, affect to glory in it, as affording a decisive proof of his divine mission, and frequently call him (as indeed he styles himself in the Koran) النبي الامي “the illiterate prophet.”

P. 157. l. 28. *He not only expressed a desire to exercise, but actually practised that very art, &c.* ذكر انس عن

البراء قال اعتمر النبي صلعم في ذي القعدة فابي اهل مكة ان يدعوه يدخل مكة حتي قاضاهم علي ان يقيم بها ثلاثة ايام فلما كتبوا الكتاب كتبوا هذا ما قاضانا عليه محمد رسول الله قالوا لا نقر بهذا لو نعلم انك رسول الله وانا محمد بن عبد الله ثم قال لعلي امح رسول الله قال لا والله لا امحوك ابدا فاحد رسول الله صلعم الكتاب وليس يكسب يكتب فكتب هذا ما قاضي عليه محمد بن عبد الله لا يدخل مكة السلاح الا اسيف في القراب وان لا يخرج من اهلها باحد ان

Narrabat Anas ex Al-Barão in-
quiens: Mense Dhu'l-Ka'ada (anni Hegjræ sexti,) Apo-
stolus Dei Visitationem-sacram indixerat: Sed Mec-
censes noluerunt ei facultatem concedere Meccam in-
trandi. Postmodum vero, (pace inita) stipulatus est
cum illis se per tres dies tantum Meccæ, (ad Visita-
tionem complendam,) moraturum. Ubi autem ad scri-
bendum Diploma accesserunt, scripsere (Mohammedis
Scribæ :) Hæ sunt conditiones, quas nobiscum stipulatus
est MOHAMMED APOSTOLUS DEI. Ibi (Meccenses) di-
xerunt: Hujusmodi nequaquam ratum habebimus: Nos
enim (volumus scribi :) MOHAMMED ABDO'LLAHI filius.
Tunc ad Alim dixit: Deleto istud, APOSTOLUS DEI.
At ille, Minime vero, inquit, Per deum! Non delebo te
in æternum. Mox Apostolus Dei Chirographum ac-
cepit, et quamvis prorsus scribendi imperitus esset,
scripsit: Hæ sunt conditiones, quas stipulatur MOHAM-
MED ABDO'LLAHI filius: Non ingreditur Meccam ar-
matus, nisi tantum accinctus gladio, eoque in vagina re-

“*condito: Neminem ex ejus civibus secum inde exire com-
 “pellet, si iste civis in ea remanere voluerit, &c.” Al-
 Bochari.*

فلما اشتد به وجعه قال ايتوني بدواة وبيضا فاكتب لكم
 كتابا لا تضلون بعدى ابدا

“Cum autem invalesceret ægritudo ejus, dixit, *Afferte
 “mihi atramentum et chartam, ut scribam vobis Librum,
 “quo post obitum meum non erretis in æternum.” Abu’l
 Feda.*

The Mahometans indeed have recourse to a miracle to account for the former of these instances, and ascribe the latter to a delirium under which the prophet laboured, from the violence of his disease. It is, however, far more probable to suppose, that in these trying situations the impostor for a while forgot the ignorance which he had assumed, and discovered his real character.

P. 166. l. 9. *Constitutes a new, a striking, and peculiar species of evidence for the truth of his religion*] In the form of didactic precept in which the Koran is written, and under that authority of a master which its author assumes, it was not difficult for him to impose upon the simple and unsuspecting minds of followers, who were interested in the success of his arms, and to whom the idea of his divine commission was welcome, as affording the spirit and support of their party: nor is there a necessity for recurring to any other cause for the admiration in which this composition is still held, than that principle of attachment with which all men are disposed to regard the earliest productions of their country.

But different is the manner in which the doctrines of Christianity are communicated to us, and devoid of the advantages of which Mahomet availed himself, is the simple and historical form under which the biographers of Jesus Christ represent them. Uninvested with the imposing character of master, unadorned with the splendor of conquest, *his* historians bring him forward to our

view only as the apparent brother and equal of human kind. It is to the innocence and simplicity of his life, more perhaps than to the powers with which he was invested, that they call the attention of men; and while thus artlessly, in the common scenes and amidst the humble duties of life, they display the character of their master, they leave the truth of his pretensions to be supported in every future age, as it was left in the age which was distinguished by his appearance, by the unprejudiced reasoning and inference of mankind.

In this mode of composition no arts are employed to excite astonishment, or to impose upon credulity. The conduct of the man is united with the pretensions of the teacher. The life of him who assumed to himself the title of the Saviour of the world, is related with the same simplicity as that of the lowest of our kind; and no other admiration is claimed from its narration, than what is due to the strictest form of historical truth.

That the *manner*, therefore, in which the Gospels are written, is not considered as grand and unequivocal a testimony of the truth of Christianity, as that of the Koran is by the followers of Mahomet, can only be ascribed to that splendor of evidence, in which this comparatively meaner one is lost; being too distant and refined to affect the generality of mankind.

P. 185. l. 9. *To exemplify these extraordinary qualities and virtues in the actions of that life, &c.]* A more regular and minute discussion of Christ's life and actions does not fall within the design of these Sermons. Bishop NEWCOME has indeed exhausted the subject in a work which does equal honour to the piety, taste, and learning of its excellent Author. See *Observations on our Lord's Conduct as a Divine Instructor, and on the Excellence of his Moral Character*.

P. 209. l. 5. *And more particularly by Christ in the*

New] “* And when Jesus the son of Mary said, O
 “ children of Israel, verily I am the apostle of God sent
 “ unto you, confirming the law which was delivered be-
 “ fore me, and bringing good tidings of an apostle who
 “ shall come after me, and whose name shall be † AH-
 “ MED.” Kor. chap. lxi.

A similar prediction is impiously ascribed to Christ in the spurious Gospel which bears the name of St. Barnabas; a work, which (as I have already observed ‡) probably was originally forged by heretical Christians, and has since been interpolated to support the pretensions of Mahomet. The Arabic original still exists in the East ||: and translations both into the Italian and Spanish languages are preserved in Europe. By the obliging communication of the Rev. Dr. MONKHOUSE of Queen's College, who has in his possession an ancient MS. containing the whole Spanish version, and also a translation of a considerable part of the work into literal English, I am enabled to give my readers some specimens of this audacious forgery, and of the manner in which the gospel history has been here corrupted, so as to accommodate it to the interests and assertions of the Koran.

Chap. 96.

“ And when Jesus had ended his prayer, the High
 “ Priest cried with a loud voice, Stay, Jesus, we want to
 “ know who thou art, for the quiet of our people. He
 “ answered, I am Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, of
 “ the stock of David, a mortal man, and fear God, and

* واذ قال عيسى ابن مريم يا بني اسرائيل اني رسول الله
 اليكم مصدقا لما بين يدي من التوراة ومبشرا برسول ياتي
 من بعدي اسمه احمد

† *Ahmed* is derived from the same root, and signifies the same as *Mahammed*, or *Mahomet*.

‡ Sermon VIII. p. 274.

|| See *Sale's* Prelim. Discour. p. 74.

“ seek his honour and glory. The High Priest said, It
“ is written in the book of Moses, that God is to send
“ the Messias, who will come and declare the truth, and
“ will bring mercy with him; and therefore we desire
“ thee to tell us, if thou art the Messias whom we ex-
“ pect? Jesus said, It is true that God has so promised,
“ but I am not he: for he was created before me. The
“ High Priest said, By thy words and signs we know
“ that thou art a prophet and a saint of God; and there-
“ fore I intreat thee in his name and for his sake, that
“ thou tell us how the Messias will come. Jesus an-
“ swered, As God liveth, I am not that Messias which
“ the tribes of the earth wait for, as God promised by
“ our father Abraham, saying, In thy family I will bless
“ all tribes. But when God shall take me out of the
“ world, Satan will again promote this cursed sedition,
“ making the wicked believe that I am the Son of God.
“ My words and doctrine will be corrupted, insomuch
“ that scarce thirty faithful shall be found. Then will
“ God have mercy on his people, and will send his mes-
“ senger into the world, by whom he hath created all
“ things: and he will come from the South with power,
“ and will destroy idolaters, and take away from Satan
“ the empire that he has over men, and will bring the
“ mercy of God and salvation to those that shall believe
“ him. Blessed are those that shall believe him.”

Chap. 97.

“ I that am unworthy to loose his shoes, have had the
“ favour to see him. The President, High Priest, and
“ Herod, said, Disturb not thyself, Jesus the saint of
“ God, for in our time there will be no more sedition:
“ for we will write to the holy senate of Rome, that by
“ an imperial decree none may call thee God. Jesus
“ said, I am not comforted with this; for from whence
“ ye hope for light, darkness will come. But my conso-
“ lation is in the coming of the Messenger of God, who

“ will destroy all false opinions concerning me; and his
 “ law shall run through the whole world; for so God
 “ promised our father Abraham. And above all, my
 “ comfort is, that his faith shall have no end, but shall
 “ be inviolable, and preserved by God. The High Priest
 “ said, Will any more prophets appear after the coming
 “ of the Messiah? Jesus answered, There will come no
 “ more true prophets sent by God: but there will come
 “ many false prophets, for which I grieve; because they
 “ will be stirred up by Satan by the just judgment of
 “ God, and they will shelter themselves with my gospel.
 “ Herod said, How is it the just judgment of God, that
 “ such wicked men should come? Jesus said, It is just
 “ that he that believes not the truth to his salvation,
 “ should believe a lie to his condemnation; for the world
 “ despiseth the good and believeth the bad, as is seen in
 “ the time of Micheas and Jeremias: for every one lov-
 “ eth his like. The High Priest said, What will the
 “ Messiah be called, and how shall his coming and man-
 “ ner of life be known? Jesus answered, The name of
 “ the messenger of God is ADMIRABLE*; for God him-
 “ self gave it him after he had created his soul, and placed
 “ it in celestial brightness. God said, Observe Moham-
 “ med, for I will for thy sake create paradise and the
 “ world with a great number of creatures, of which I
 “ make thee a present: so that whosoever shall bless
 “ thee shall be blessed, and whosoever shall curse thee
 “ shall be cursed. And when I shall send thee into the
 “ world, I will send thee for my messenger of salvation,
 “ and thy words shall be true; so that heaven and earth
 “ shall fail, but they shall never fail in thy law. Mo-
 “ hammed is his blessed name. Then the multitude lift
 “ up their voices and said, Send us, O our God, thy
 “ messenger; come presently, O Mohammed, for the
 “ salvation of the world.”

* This is an allusion to the name of Mohammed, which is a participle
 passive from the Arabic verb *مدح* to praise, to commend.

P. 197. l. 4. *By the advocates of Mahometism the Koran has been always held forth as the greatest of* “miracles] Auctor celebris Abu Mohammed Mostapha Ebnalsaib Hasan, cognomine Gennabi, asserit “*Alcoranum continere sexaginta millia miracula.* Ahmed “filius Abdo'l Halim in sua apologia affirmat *Alcoranum esse majus miraculum, quam suscitationem mortuorum: et excellenter continere omnes alios sacros libros; et complecti omnia tempora, præterita, præsentia, et futura.* Algazel in professione fidei Mahometicæ profitetur, Alcoranum esse قدیم قایم بذات الله, æternum, subsistentem essentia Dei.” Maracci de Alcorano, p. 43, 44.

P. 199. l. 5. *In the language of Arabia also]* Of the language of Arabia, in the time of Mahomet, there were several distinct dialects. The grand distinction, however, was that which subsisted between the language of the tribes of Hamyar and of Koreish. That of Hamyar is said to have been the most ancient, and to have approached nearest in its genius and signification to the Hebrew and Syriac. The dialect of Koreish was, however, universally esteemed the most elegant, and in opposition to the other was called العربية المحضة the pure Arabic. The superior degree of refinement which the tribe of Koreish had introduced into their language, arose from various causes; from their distinguished rank as guardians of the temple of Mecca; from their situation, almost in the centre of Arabia, which precluded them from such an intercourse with foreigners, as might have corrupted their language; and above all, from the continual resort of the several tribes to Mecca, which gave them an opportunity of selecting from their discourse and compositions such words and expressions as they deemed most elegant, and thus gradually of transfusing the various beauties of the whole language into their own dialect. In this dialect the Koran is written; and of this purity and perspicuity of his language Ma-

homet frequently boasts. See Pocock's *Specim.* p. 150, 151, 152. *Koran*, p. 223.

P. 209. l. 28. *There is indeed no evidence of the authenticity of any compositions, &c.*] The high veneration with which the scriptures have been respected, and that suspicious jealousy with which they have been guarded both by Jews and Christians of every sect, even from the earliest ages, afford a strong argument against the charge of corruption. The Jews, in particular, are said to have carried this regard even to the excess of superstition. Their laborious zeal has prompted some among them to number even the chapters, the sentences, and the words contained in their scriptures: and they have further remarked, how often, and in what form, each word occurs throughout the whole. Their accuracy and caution in transcribing their sacred volumes was, if possible, still greater. One of their Rabbins* has enumerated no less than twenty precepts concerning this matter, the strictest and most cautious which superstitious zeal could dictate. Their scriptures were not confined to the hands of a few interested individuals, their priests or their rulers, but were dispersed at large throughout the whole body of the Jewish nation: they were publicly read in their synagogues every sabbath, where they were likewise deposited under the immediate sanction of public authority, and preserved with an awful veneration, which in the present age will, perhaps, with difficulty be conceived or credited. Every, even the most accidental, mark of disrespect was deemed a crime, which nothing less than rigorous mortification could expiate.

P. 210. l. 21. *The very exceptions to this general position are few, and contribute additional proofs in favour of the sacred text*] Trifling variations are by no means sufficient to deprive any writings of their claim to the cha-

* Rabbi Moses, in tractatu de Lib. Leg. cap. 10.

racter of purity. If this should be admitted, the authenticity of every composition which has passed through the hands of transcribers and translators is at once destroyed; for since all are unavoidably subject to such errors, all must of course be involved in one common censure. It may be further observed, that on this ground, strong objections might be made to the Koran itself, as well as to our Scriptures. That too has its various readings, in the accurate collection of which the laborious industry of Mahometan commentators has been frequently employed. Different copies differ materially in the titles of the chapters, the number of verses, the distinction of periods, and other particulars which strongly affect the sense.

The Koran of the Persians and the Shiites differs in many places from that of the Turks and Sonnites, even in essential points. Yet that any argument can be drawn from hence against the purity and integrity of their scriptures, the followers of Mahomet absolutely and universally deny.

P. 211. l. 17. *That no such corruption as he pretended has ever happened to our scriptures.*] Whilst we defend the integrity of our scriptures against the absurd and futile objections of Mahomet and his deluded followers, we should be careful lest by our own injudicious conduct we give occasion to a similar charge. A serious and thinking man cannot but be alarmed at that unbounded licence of conjecture, and that extravagant rage for correction and alteration of the sacred text, which has been too often indulged by pious, though injudicious commentators. That the text of every edition which we possess stands frequently in need of emendation, cannot perhaps be denied. But the proper mode of emendation seems to be, not by fanciful speculation and conjecture, but by *facts*; by a comparison of ancient MSS, and ancient versions. Much too is to be effected towards the illustration of obscure and difficult passages

of scripture, by an accurate knowledge of the cognate languages, and by an attention to the manners and customs of eastern nations.

P. 233. Further observations on Miracles.

In judging of Miracles there are certain criteria, peculiar to the subject, sufficient to conduct our enquiries, and warrant our determination. Assuredly they do not appeal to our ignorance, for they presuppose, not only the existence of a general order of things, but our actual knowledge of the appearance that order exhibits, and of the secondary material causes, from which it, in most cases, proceeds. If a miraculous event were effected by the immediate hand of God, and yet bore no mark of distinction from the ordinary effects of his agency, it would impress no conviction, and probably awaken no attention.

Our knowledge of the ordinary course of things, though limited, is real, and therefore it is essential to a Miracle, both that it differ from that course, and be accompanied with peculiar and unequivocal signs of such difference.

But as the term NATURE is frequently used, and sometimes abused, in the controversy upon this subject, I beg leave to state, in a few words, my own ideas. The course of nature is, we are told, fixed and unalterable, and therefore it is not consistent with the immutability of God to perform Miracles. But surely, they who reason in this manner, beg the point in question. We have no right to assume, that the Deity has ordained such general laws as will exclude his interposition, and we cannot suppose that he would forbear to interfere, where any important end could be answered. This in-

terposition, though it controls, in particular cases, the energy, does not diminish the utility of those laws. It leaves them to fulfil their own proper purposes, and only effects a distinct purpose for which they were not calculated.

Let us, however, ask, what is meant by this stability in the order of Nature? Gravitation is known by experience, and acts according to rules, which repeated observation has enabled us to ascertain: yet Magnetism, of which the rules are doubtless equally fixed, though more imperfectly known, suspends the force of gravitation. Is Nature then uncertain in her operations, or should we not rather say, that in different circumstances her agency is different? Have not both their proper sphere of action, and does it betray any credulity in admitting the evidence of those who have marked their opposite effects? In certain circumstances we may have strong reason to expect, that the one would act rather than the other. But by a competent witness of the fact we should be soon persuaded to believe, that a Phenomenon, however extraordinary in itself, and however different from our pre-conceived opinions, really existed. If the course of Nature implies the general laws of matter and motion, into which the most opposite phenomena may be resolved, it is certain, that we do not yet know them in their full extent; and therefore that events, which are related by judicious and disinterested persons, and at the same time imply no gross contradiction, are possible in themselves, and capable of a certain degree of proof.

If the course of Nature implies the whole order of events, which God has ordained for the government of the world, it includes both his ordinary and extraordinary dispensations, and among them Miracles may have their place, as a part of the universal plan. It is, indeed, consistent with sound philosophy, and not inconsistent with pure religion, to acknowledge, that they

were disposed by the supreme Being at the same time with the more ordinary effects of his power; that their causes and occasions were arranged with the same regularity; and that in reference chiefly to their concomitant circumstances of persons, and times, to the specific ends for which they were employed, and to our idea of the immediate necessity there is for a divine agent, Miracles differ from common events, in which the hand of God acts as efficaciously, though less visibly. On this consideration of the subject, Miracles, instead of contradicting Nature, form a part of it: and all I object to is, that what our limited reason and scanty experience may comprehend, should be represented as a full and exact view of the possible or actual varieties which exist in the work of God.

Are we then asked, whether miracles be CREDIBLE? We reply, that, abstractedly considered, they are not totally incredible; that they are capable of indirect proof from analogy; and of direct from testimony; that in the common and daily course of worldly affairs, events, the improbability of which, antecedently to all testimony, was very great, is overcome and destroyed by the authority of competent and honest witnesses; that the Christian Miracles were objects of real and proper experience to those who saw them; and that whatsoever the senses of mankind can perceive, their report may substantiate.

Should it be asked, whether Miracles were NECESSARY? and whether the end proposed to be effected by them could warrant so immediate and extraordinary an interference of the Almighty, as such extraordinary operations suppose? To this we might answer, that, if the fact be established, all reasonings *a priori* concerning their necessity must be frivolous, and may be false. We are not capable of deciding on a question, which, however simple in appearance, is yet too complex in its parts, and too extensive in its object, to be fully com-

prehended by the human understanding. We know not what event is necessary, or what means are requisite to effect it. Events apparently insignificant are frequently combined with others of the greatest magnitude and importance, and indeed so combined as to be inseparable from them; nay to have been the conditional causes without which they could not be produced, and even the efficient causes which actually produced them.

Whether God could, or could not, have effected all the ends designed to be promoted by the gospel, without deviating from the common course of his providence, and interfering with its general laws, is a speculation that a modest enquirer would carefully avoid; for it carries on the very face of it a degree of presumption, totally unbecoming the state of a mortal being. Infinitely safer is it for us to acquiesce in what the Almighty has done, than to embarrass our minds with speculations about what he might have done. Enquiries of this kind are generally inconclusive, and always useless. They rest on no solid principles, are conducted by no fixed rules, and lead to no clear conviction. They begin from curiosity or vanity; they are prosecuted amidst ignorance and error; and they frequently terminate in impious presumption or universal scepticism.

He that arraigns the necessity of an extraordinary providence, may in the end question even the existence of an ordinary one: for when the genius of wild and undistinguishing enquiry is once let loose on ground where there are no direct paths, and no settled limits, who can tell whither the extravagant and impetuous spirit may be carried?

God is the best, and indeed the only judge, how far Miracles are proper to promote any particular design of his providence: and how far that design would have been left unaccomplished, if common and ordinary methods only had been pursued. So from the absence of Miracles we may conclude, in any supposed case, that

they were not necessary; from their existence, supported by fair testimony, in any given case, we may infer with confidence that they are proper.

Now we are not only capable of opposing one conjecture to another, and of confronting an objection founded on metaphysical speculations by an answer of the same kind; but we may proceed on grounds yet more solid and satisfactory. A view of the state of the world in general, and of the Jewish nation in particular, and an examination of the nature and tendency of the Christian religion, will point out very clearly the great expediency of a miraculous interposition; and when we reflect on the gracious and important ends that were to be effected by it, we shall be convinced that it was not an idle and useless display of divine power; but that while the means effected and confirmed the end, the end fully justified and illustrated the means.

If we reflect on the almost irresistible force of prejudice, and the strong opposition it universally made to the establishment of a new religion on the demolition of rites and ceremonies, which authority had made sacred, and custom had familiarized; if we reflect on the extent and importance, as well as the singularity of the Christian plan; what was its avowed purpose to effect, and what difficulties it was necessarily called to struggle with, before that purpose could be effected; how much it was opposed by the opinions and by the practice of the generality of mankind; by philosophy; by superstition; by corrupt passions, and by inveterate habits; by pride, and sensuality; in short, by every engine of human influence, whether formed by craft, or aided by power; if we seriously reflect on these things, and give them their due force, (and experience shews us that we can scarcely give them too much,) we shall be induced to admit even the necessity of a miraculous interposition, at a time when common means must inevitably, in our apprehensions, have failed of success.

The revelation of the divine will by inspired persons is, as such, miraculous; and therefore before the adversaries of the gospel can employ with propriety their objections to the particular Miracles on which its credibility is rested, they should shew the impossibility of any revelation whatsoever. If they grant, what indeed they cannot disprove, the possible existence of a revelation, it is absurd to say, that the Deity can interfere in the act of revealing his will, and cannot in supplying evidences for the reality of his interference. In whatsoever age the revelation be given, succeeding ages can know it only from testimony; and if they admit, on the report of their fellow-creatures, that God had inspired any being with the preternatural knowledge of his will, why should they deny, that he had enabled the same being to heal the sick, or to cleanse the leprous? And how, may it be asked, should the divine Teacher give a more direct and consistent proof of his preternatural commission, than by displaying those signs and wonders, which mark the finger of God?

As then the fact itself implies no impossibility, the credibility of it will depend upon the character of those who report it, and on the end which it professes to pursue.

That the Apostles could not be deceived, and that they had no temptation to deceive, has been repeatedly demonstrated; and so powerful is the proof adduced in support of their testimony, that the infidels of these later days have been obliged to abandon the ground on which their predecessors stood; to disclaim all moral evidences arising from the character and relation of eye-witnesses; and to maintain, upon metaphysical rather than historical principles, that Miracles are utterly incapable in their own nature of existing in any circumstances, or of being supported by any evidence.

To illustrate these general observations on the subject of Miracles by an induction of particular instances,

would be unnecessary. Those instances have been frequently adduced, and ably enforced by several eminent writers, and never more successfully than by one*, whose long and well-spent life has been useful to the world, and ornamental to the learned body to which he belongs; whose erudition derives fresh lustre from his virtues, and whose character is equally venerable as a defender of the Christian faith, and as a pattern of Christian meekness and benevolence.

P. 256. l. 23. *When the Caliph Omar, the contemporary and companion of Mahomet, was solicited to spare the celebrated library of Alexandria, he replied to this effect.*] See Abu'l Pharaj. *Hist. Dynast.* p. 180. Harris's *Philological Enquiries*, p. 251. *Modern Universal Hist.* Vol. I. p. 498.

P. 261. l. 1. *Mahomet seems to have entertained very gross and mistaken ideas of the Christian Trinity]*

If we trace the Christian religion through the various revolutions of the church, we shall observe two doctrines which, beyond all the rest, mark with a distinguishing lustre the creed which justly deserves the appellation of Catholic. Explications of those doctrines may vary; but the grand essentials of them seem to be interwoven with the original texture of Christian faith, I mean the doctrines of the DIVINITY and ATONEMENT of Christ: doctrines alike unknown to the Koran of Mahomet and the Creed of Socinus.

Yet, notwithstanding this remarkable coincidence of opinion, there is scarcely any thing which the modern Socinian affects to regard with greater abhorrence and indignation, than a comparison that associates his own tenets with those of Mahomet. To the eye of reason, however, the similarity is clear and apparent. The title of Unitarian is equally boasted of by the disciple of Socinus and the follower of the Arabian prophet. Both of

* See Dr. Adams's judicious reply to Mr. Hume.

them reject the Divinity of our Lord; and, with a confidence wholly unbecoming a being whose faculties are so bounded as man's, both of them maintain the impossibility of a threefold mode of subsistence in the divine nature, because the human intellect is incapable of forming any precise ideas of the subject: as if nothing could be real in the essence of the divinity, which is not level to the comprehension of man! The objections of both to this sublime mystery proceed on the same presumptions. I call them *presumptions*; for they merit no better title. The appeal to reason will not be granted, till reason is proved to be infallible. Its objections are brought from an imperfect faculty, exercised in a limited sphere. But the doctrine I am now speaking of, as it was not of its discovery, so neither is it a subject for its investigation. Reason has no data in itself on which to proceed, either for finding it out independently of a divine revelation, or for scrutinizing it when it is revealed.

Metaphysical arguments and reasonings *a priori* must at best be precarious and unsatisfactory. Beings, formed as we are, must derive conviction from another quarter. We can only reason from what we know: and where we have no grounds in that species of evidence which falls within the sphere of human observation, we must rest satisfied with our ignorance. But if a revelation is given to supply the defects of natural knowledge, and unfold such doctrines as reason could have formed no conception of; instead of cavilling at their mysteriousness, we ought silently and gratefully to acquiesce in their truth.

But the Socinian and the Mahometan object to our doctrine its inconsistency with human reason. The objection supposes that man is possessed of a larger comprehension than falls to the lot of mortality; and that what he cannot understand, cannot be true.

We appeal to the scriptures. But the Mahometans and Socinians have both discovered the same methods of interpretation; and either by false glosses pervert

their plain and obvious meaning; or, when the testimony is so direct and explicit, that no forced construction can evade it, they have recourse to the last artifice of abortive zeal; the cry of interpolation!

If the Mahometan denies, like the Phantomist of more ancient times, the reality of the sufferings and death of Christ, as represented by the evangelists; the Socinian, by denying their efficacy, sinks them to the level of common martyrdom: and though the facts themselves be not questioned, yet their design and end is totally lost in the creed of Socinus.

“But let God be true, and every man a liar.” If these are the doctrines of the gospel, let us receive them, whether Mahometans be converted or not. Let us deliver and defend the truth, let the success of it be what it will.

There is no period of the Christian church in which the Divinity of Christ was not admitted as a primary article: nor can the enemies of this doctrine point out the *time* when, if it be a falsity, it was admitted as a truth: much less can they *account* for its admission into the several symbols of Christian faith in the very first ages, if it was a doctrine unknown to Christ and his Apostles. The Socinian hypothesis staggers all speculation. It is contrary to every maxim of historical evidence; and, if pursued to its obvious consequences, includes in it the overthrow of Christianity, and renders every record of every age suspicious and uncertain. It reverses the common rules by which we judge of past events; and, in the strictest sense of the expression, makes the *first*, *last*, and the *last*, *first*;—makes the less superior to the greater; and what is doubtful and partial, more decisive than what is full, clear, and certain.

Examine Socinianism by any rule of history that has been adopted for the trial of any fact, or the determination that has been passed on any opinion, and we can

scarcely avoid seeing its utter inconsistency with the universal creed of the Christian church from the earliest period of its existence to the present time.

Is it then probable, that the whole church should have formed a wrong idea, not only of a few circumstantial points, but of matters of the highest consequence, through every period in which we are capable of tracing the history of its opinions? If Christ was nothing more than a *mere man*, how can it be accounted for, that his DIVINITY should be the general and current sentiment of the church in so early a period as the present enemies of the doctrine are obliged to acknowledge it was? It was acknowledged by those who were the immediate followers of the apostles: and when heretics who opposed the doctrine arose, they were answered in set treatises by those who may justly be called the great guardians of the church, and whose particular business it was to explain, illustrate, and defend its doctrines. What they delivered on this subject, they delivered not as their own private speculations, but as the known and avowed sense of the Catholic church. They were only the instruments of communicating this sense of Christian doctrines to the world. They did not pride themselves on the novelties of invention. They came forward with an established rule in their hands; and were happy to be esteemed not *the setters forth of strange doctrines*, but the plain assertors of old and acknowledged truths.

Socinianism makes every thing doubtful. And no wonder—while it makes so little of the most express declarations of scripture, we need not be surprised that it should pay so little respect to the plainest evidence of history.

Some late attempts on the Christian system have alarmed the fears of more modest and humble believers. The attempts, however, though artfully conducted, have defeated their own end. The zeal of innovation has

stretched beyond its own measure: and sober Christians have been rather shocked by its daring outrages, than staggered in their faith by its speciousness and sophistry.

If the attempts had succeeded, we should have had little remaining but the name of Christianity: and that in the end would have yielded to a name more grateful to those who would rob it of its distinguishing honours.

The gradation from Socinianism to Deism is very slight; and especially that species of Socinianism which has been patronized by a writer, who in order to support it has thought proper to abandon the inspiration of the scriptures; and has made no scruple to call the apostle St. Paul an inconclusive reasoner*. On such a footing Socinianism may possibly maintain its ground. But on such a footing Deism may maintain its ground much better: and it is rather wonderful that those who have given up so much, should retain any thing. For what is there in Christianity, when all its distinguishing doctrines are taken away, that could render it a subject worthy of a particular revelation? Did the stupendous miracles that were wrought to introduce and establish it in the world, and the train of prophecies which were gradually disclosed to point out its high and illustrious origin, find an end suitable to their extraordinary nature?

Morality, and a future state, include the whole of Christianity according to the representation of a Socinian. But suppose a Deist should adopt (as many have, and justly may) the same morality, and the same sanctions on the ground of natural evidence, wherein lies the essential and discriminating characteristic of Christianity? Where lies the real difference between a believer in divine revelation and a religious theist?

Socinianism cuts to the very root of all that is distin-

* *Corruptions of Christianity*, Vol. II. p. 370.

guishing in the gospel. It destroys the necessity, and even the importance, of a miraculous interposition, and gives the infidel too great reason to exclaim, that all that was extraordinary was superfluous; and that the apparatus was too expensive and too splendid for the purposes to which it was applied.

This seems to be an argument *a priori* against that species of Christianity, which some, under the pretence of refining it from corruption, would reduce to the level of natural religion.

P. 267. l. 12. *That romantic fable of the angel of death*] Vid. Koran, p. 339. l. 9. *Mill. Dissert. de Mohammedismo ante Moham.* p. 82. Hyde in *Notis ad Bobov. de Visit. ægrot.* p. 19. R. Elias, in *Tishbi.* See also Buxtorf. *Synag. Judaic. et Lexic. Talmud.*

Ibid. l. 16. *That imaginary, yet dreaded tribunal*] Vid. Al-Gazal. apud Maracc. *Prodr. ad refut. Alcoran.* Part. iii. p. 90. col. 1. *Mill Dissert. de Mohammedismo, &c.* p. 76. et *ejusdem Orat. Inaugur.* p. 14.

Ibid. l. 25. *The vast but ideal balance*] Vid. Kor. p. 286. l. 10. *Mill. Dissert. de Mohammedismo, &c.* p. 81, 82, 83. Sale's *Prelim. Disc.* p. 89.

P. 274. l. 6. *We are there told, &c.*]

The whole history is thus related in *the Gospel of Barnabas*: and as the representation which it gives, though false and absurd, is yet novel and curious, I make no apology to my readers for quoting it at large.

Chap. 216.

“ Judas came near to the people with whom Jesus
 “ was; and when he heard the noise he entered into the
 “ house where the disciples slept. And God seeing the
 “ fear and danger of his servant, ordered Gabriel and
 “ Michael and Rafael and Azrael to carry him out of
 “ the world. And they came in all haste, and bare him
 “ out of the window which looks towards the south.
 “ And they placed him in the third heaven, where he

“ will remain blessing God, in the company of angels,
“ till near the end of the world.

Chap. 217.

“ And Judas the traitor entered before the rest into
“ the place from which Jesus had just been taken up.
“ And the disciples were sleeping. And the wonderful
“ God acted wonderfully, changing Judas into the same
“ figure and speech with Jesus. We believing that it
“ was he, said to him, Master, whom seekest thou? And
“ he said to them, smiling, Ye have forgotten yourselves,
“ since ye do not know Judas Iscariot.

“ At this time the soldiery entered; and seeing Judas
“ so like in every respect to Jesus, laid hands upon
“ him, &c.”

Chap. 218.

In which is related the passion of Judas the traitor.

“ The soldiers afterwards took Judas, and bound him,
“ notwithstanding he said with truth to them that he
“ was not Jesus. And the soldiers mocked him, saying,
“ Sir, do not be afraid; for we are come to make thee
“ King of Israel; and we have bound thee, because we
“ know thou hast refused the kingdom. And Judas
“ said, Ye have lost your senses. I came to shew you
“ Jesus, that ye might take him; and ye have bound
“ me, who am your guide. The soldiers lost their pa-
“ tience, hearing this, and they began to go with him,
“ striking and buffeting him, till they reached Jerusa-
“ lem, &c. &c.

Chap. 219.

“ They carried him to mount Calvary, where they
“ executed criminals, and crucified him, stripping him
“ naked for the greater ignominy. Then he did nothing
“ but cry out, O my God, why hast thou forsaken me,
“ that I should die unjustly, when the real malefactor
“ hath escaped?

“ *I say in truth * that he was so like in person, figure,*
 “ *and gesture to Jesus, that as many as knew him, believed*
 “ *firmly that it was he, except Peter:* for which reason
 “ many left his doctrine, believing that it had been
 “ false; as he had said that he should not die till the
 “ end of the world. But those who stood firm were
 “ oppressed with grief, seeing him die whom they un-
 “ derstood to be Jesus: not recollecting what he had
 “ told them. And in company with his mother, they
 “ were present at his death, weeping continually. And
 “ by means of Joseph Abarimatheas †, they obtained
 “ from the president the body of Judas. And they took
 “ him down from the cross, burying him with much la-
 “ mentation in the new sepulchre of Joseph; having
 “ wrapped him up in linen and precious ointments.

Chap. 220.

“ They all returned, each man to his house: and he
 “ who writeth, with James and John, went with the
 “ mother of Jesus to Nazareth. And the disciples, who
 “ did not fear God with truth, went by night and stole
 “ the body of Judas, and hid it; spreading a report, that
 “ he [i. e. Jesus] had risen again, from whence sprung
 “ great confusion among the people. And the high-
 “ priest commanded, under pain of Anathema, that no
 “ one should talk of him; and on this account raised a
 “ great persecution, banishing some, tormenting others,
 “ and even stoning some to death: because it was not
 “ in the power of any one to be silent on this subject.
 “ And then came news to Nazareth, that Jesus had risen
 “ again. And he that writeth, desired the mother of
 “ Jesus to leave off her lamentation. And Mary said,
 “ Let us go to Jerusalem, to see if it is truth. If I see
 “ him, I shall die content.

* What is here printed in Italics, is written in the MS. in red characters.

† It is thus written in the MS.

Chap. 221.

“ The Virgin returned to Jerusalem with him that
“ writeth, and James and John, the same day that the
“ decree of the high-priest came out. And as she feared
“ God, though she knew the command was unjust, she
“ entreated those who talked with her not to speak of
“ her Son. Who can say, how we were then affected?
“ God, who knows the heart of man, knows that between
“ the grief for the death of Judas, whom we understood
“ to be Jesus, and the pleasure of seeing him risen again,
“ we almost expired. And the angels who were the
“ guardians of Mary went up to heaven the third day,
“ and told Jesus what was passing. And he, moved
“ with compassion for his mother, entreated of God
“ that he might be seen by his disciples. And the com-
“ passionate God ordered his four favourite angels to
“ place him within his own house, and to guard him
“ three days: that they and they only might see him,
“ who believed in his doctrine. Jesus descended, sur-
“ rounded with light, into the house of his mother:
“ where were the two sisters, Martha and Mary, and
“ Lazarus, and he that writeth, and John and James,
“ and Peter. And when they saw him, they fell with
“ their faces on the earth, as if dead. And Jesus lifted
“ them up; saying, Fear not, for I am your Master.
“ Lament not from henceforth, for I am alive. They
“ were astonished at seeing Jesus, because they thought
“ him dead. And Mary weeping said, Tell me, my Son,
“ why, if God gave thee power to raise up the dead, did
“ he consent that thou shouldest die, with so much re-
“ proach and shame to thy relations and friends, and so
“ much hurt to thy doctrine, leaving us all in desola-
“ tion? Jesus replied, embracing his mother, Believe
“ me, for I tell thee the truth, I have not been dead;
“ for God has reserved me for the end of the world. In
“ saying this he desired the Angels to manifest them-
“ selves, and to tell how he had passed through every

“ thing. At the instant they appeared like four suns;
“ and all present prostrated themselves on the ground,
“ overcome by the presence of the Angels. And Jesus
“ gave to all of them something to cover themselves
“ with; that they might be able to hear the angels
“ speak. And Jesus said to his mother, These are the
“ Ministers of God. Gabriel knows his secrets; Mi-
“ chael fights with his enemies; Asrafiel will cite all to
“ judgment; and Azrael receives the souls. And the
“ holy Angels told, how they had, by the command of
“ God, taken up Jesus, and transformed Judas, that he
“ might suffer the punishment which he wished to bring
“ on Jesus. And he that writeth said, Is it lawful for
“ me to ask of thee, in the same manner as when thou
“ wast in the world? And Jesus answered, Speak, Bar-
“ nabas, what thou wishest. And he said, I wish that
“ thou wouldest tell me, how God, being so compas-
“ sionate, could afflict us so much, in giving us to un-
“ derstand that thou wast he that suffered, for we have
“ been very near dying? And thou being a prophet, why
“ did he suffer thee to fall under disgrace, by [apparently]
“ placing thee on a cross, and between two robbers? Je-
“ sus answered, Believe me, Barnabas, let the fault be
“ ever so small, God chastiseth it with much punish-
“ ment. And as my mother and faithful disciples loved
“ me with a little earthly love, God chastised that love
“ by this grief; that he might not chastise it in the
“ other world. And though I was innocent, yet as they
“ called me God, and his Son, that the devils might not
“ mock me on the day of judgment, he has chosen that
“ I should be mocked in this world. And this mocking
“ shall last till the holy messenger of God † shall come,
“ who shall undeceive all believers. And then he said,
“ Just art thou, O God! and to thee only belongeth the
“ honour and glory, with worship, for ever!

† i. e. Mahomet.

Chap. 222, and the last.

“ And then he said, See Barnabas that thou by all
“ means write my Gospel, relating every thing which
“ has happened in the world concerning me; and let it
“ be done exactly; in order that the faithful may be un-
“ deceived, knowing the truth. He that writeth said,
“ Master, I will do it as thou commandest me, God will-
“ ing: but I did not see all that happened with Judas.
“ Jesus answered, Here stand Peter and John, who saw
“ it, and who will relate it to thee. And he told James
“ and John to call the seven apostles who were absent,
“ and Nicodemus, and Joseph Abarimatheas, and some
“ of the 72 disciples. When they were come, they did
“ eat with him; and on the third day he commanded
“ them all to go to the Mount of Olives with his mo-
“ ther: because he was to return to heaven. All the
“ apostles and disciples went, except 25 of the 72, who
“ had fled to Damascus with fear. And exactly at mid-
“ day, while they were all in prayer, Jesus came with
“ many Angels (blessing God) with so much brightness,
“ that they all bent their faces to the ground. And Je-
“ sus raised them up, saying, Fear not your Master, who
“ comes to take leave of you, and to reccommend you
“ to God our Lord, by the mercies received from his
“ bounty: and be He with you! And upon this he dis-
“ appeared with the angels; all of us remaining amazed
“ at the great brightness in which he left us.”

P. 295. *Ye shall know them by their fruits.*] There are various tests of moral truth: and the excellency of a religion may be judged of under distinct lights, all of which are calculated to give reciprocal strength and evidence to each other; though doubtless some are better adapted than others to afford conviction to the generality of enquirers. Few minds are qualified for abstract speculation; and fewer still are satisfied with the conclusions which result from a train of reasoning that is built on it.

But of that evidence which arises from facts most persons are capable of judging: and as the Christian religion is designed for universal benefit, the wisdom of Providence has adapted its proofs to the object it had in view; and rendered them clear and open to the senses, in order that they might carry more certain conviction to the understanding.

Miracles were open testimonies of a divine interposition; and gave a sanction to the doctrines, and an authority to the precepts, in the defence of which they were professedly wrought.

The personal character of our blessed Lord, and the various parts of his conduct, both in the more retired and the more public scenes of life, afford a strong evidence for the truth of that cause which he both lived and died to promote; nor are the characters and conduct of his apostles destitute of the same evidence: for, animated by the spirit of their divine Master, they followed his example; and the constancy with which they vindicated his religion amidst the sharpest persecutions, and the cheerfulness with which they submitted to death in order to give their last seal to its truth, would not fail of leaving a very deep impression on the minds of sober and impartial observers. The astonishing triumph of Christianity over the superstition, idolatry, and wickedness of the world; over all that philosophy could contrive, and all that power could accomplish, carried with it a visible token of an Almighty hand: and the effects produced by it on individuals and societies rendered the interposition of that hand still more illustrious.

The blamelessness and purity of character, for which the primitive Christians were so much distinguished, have been acknowledged even by their enemies. Pliny, who was by no means disposed to treat them with much lenity, or their cause with much respect, confesses that the most rigid scrutiny into their conduct, turned out in every view favourable to the innocence and chastity of

their morals. It is indeed very remarkable, that the account he gives of the Christians was such as he had received, not from their friends and adherents, (whose report of their religion might be liable to the suspicion of partiality,) but from persons the least of all men inclined to sacrifice truth in order to save the credit of Christianity and its professors. He received the account from persons who had been Christians, but who either from fear or interest, or some other motive unknown but to the Judge of all, had apostatised from the church, and relapsed into idolatry. Such were the persons who affirmed, (and Pliny does not appear to disbelieve their testimony,) that the highest fault with which the Christians were justly chargeable, was their assembling on a stated day before sun-rising, and singing a hymn to Christ, as to a Deity:—in binding themselves by a sacrament to avoid every kind of wickedness, particularly fraud, robbery, and adultery:—not to violate their word, or refuse to yield up whatever had been entrusted in their hands, when it should be demanded: and that it was their custom to depart, and afterwards, to meet again at an innocent meal, where all partook in common of the entertainment that was provided*.

The ancient apologists constantly challenged their enemies to produce any accusations against them which tended to impeach their morals: and appealed to their conduct, as an evidence in their favour, with a confidence which nothing but conscious uprightness could have inspired. Instead of shrinking from the severest trial that jealousy itself could make, they invited their adversaries to meet them upon a ground, where the merits of the question could be ascertained most exactly; where success was to be most honourable, and defeat most ignominious.

Their meekness and forbearance amidst the most injurious treatment, and their patience and perseverance

* Lib. x. Epist. 97.

amidst the most threatening dangers, were objects of admiration even to their persecutors. But their benevolence was as amiable as their zeal was ardent: and while truth gave them courage to brave distress and death, compassion softened their hearts when they beheld the miseries of others; and the tenderest sympathy was united with the most inflexible integrity.

Eusebius has preserved in his Ecclesiastical History * a very memorable fragment of an epistle of Dionysius the Bishop of Alexandria, who flourished at the time when the empire under Gallienus was distracted by internal divisions, arising from the interfering interests of contending and jealous competitors for power; and when the calamities of war were doubled by the more dreadful visitation of plagues, and famine, and earthquakes. At a crisis so trying as this the Christian religion had an opportunity of shewing its superior influence, by the exemplary conduct of its professors. Their resignation to God, and their unwearied benevolence towards the distressed, exerted at the hazard of their own lives, and manifested by the most endearing attentions that the tenderest compassion could dictate, are described in this Epistle in a manner so striking and pathetic, as necessarily to impress the mind with a deep sense of the power of that religion, which nourishes the gentler qualities of the human heart, and soothes its more amiable feelings at the time that it arms the breast with a more than common fortitude, and enables the Christian to *stand in the evil day, and endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. The venerable father at the same time remarks the different behaviour of the heathen. They abandoned their dearest friends the moment that calamities overtook them; and, seeking their own safety, left the wretched to perish without relief.

Bardesanes, the celebrated Syrian Heretic, observed in his day, that Christianity in a moral and civil view had

* Lib. vii. c. 22.

been wonderfully beneficial: for that Christians of all countries had retained the good qualities and rejected the reigning vices of the several nations of which they were natives. “In Parthia (says he) the Christians, “though Parthians, are not polygamists: nor in Persia, “though Persians, do they marry their own daughters. “In Bactria and Gaul they do not violate the marriage-bed: and wherever they reside, they resist the influence “of corrupt laws and wicked customs*.”

P. 303. l. 12. *In the East, under the influence of Mahometan belief, the human mind appears to have lost somewhat of its capacity and power*] To this torpid inactivity nothing perhaps has more effectually contributed than the doctrine of Fate, which, as it is adopted in the creed of the Mussulman †, is not only derogatory from the dignity of human nature, but plainly hostile to the interests and duties of social life. It renders the reason of man useless, by destroying his free agency; it restrains and discourages industry, checks the flights of genius, and in the place of that active and persevering vigour, which can alone prevent or remedy misfortune, substitutes a passiveness without piety, and a despondence without resignation. Taught by his prophet that every human event is irrevocably preordained by the Deity, and that not the time only, but even the manner and circumstances of his death have been unalterably fixed from all eternity, the superstitious Mussulman deems every attempt to change the common order of things a crime not far removed from rebellion against the established laws of God. Hence he beholds his parents, his children, and

* Jortin's Remarks, Vol. I. p. 357. edit. 1767.

† وكل انسان الزمناه طائيرة في عنقه
Koran, ch. xvi.

ما من مولود يولد الا وفي عنقه برقة مكتوب فيها
شقي او سعيد. Al-Mojahed.

his friends falling a sacrifice to disease and death, with a stupid and ineffectual concern. Hence he views the pestilence ravaging his country, *and destroying thousands and ten thousands in his streets*, without exerting one single effort to check its baneful progress. The arts by which more enlightened nations have been enabled to repel, or at least to mitigate its rage; arts which nature, philosophy, and religion unite to recommend, are regarded by the disciple of the Arabian prophet as impious and profane. Blindly and obstinately attached to the principle of absolute and unqualified predestination, he sits in a state of torpid insensibility, till the Almighty arrests the hand of the destroying Angel, and suspends for a period the work of death and desolation.

P. 330. l. 19. *Yet Christianity far surpasses every other religion in its visible tendency to make us better men, and in its real effects upon the sentiments and the manners of mankind]* Even from the testimony of Mr. GIBBON, if we attend to his facts, without assenting implicitly to his opinions, it appears, that Christianity had in some degree contributed to the moral improvement of that empire, which, under the inauspicious influence of Paganism, had been plunged in the foulest immoralities. Frailties, absurdities, and crimes are to be found in those who wielded the sceptre after the establishment of Christianity; but the catalogue is not so numerous, or so black and portentous, as that which presents itself, to the dispassionate enquirer, in the preceding ages. We are not shocked with the cold and deliberate inhumanity of a Tiberius, with the outrageous debaucheries and frantic cruelties of a Nero, with the gross sensualities of a Vitellius, with the disgusting puerilities and odious barbarities of a Domitian!

But we may be told, that, after the introduction of the Gospel, this stupendous empire fell into ruin. Be it so. But was not the superstructure itself much defaced, and were not the very foundations loosened, long before, un-

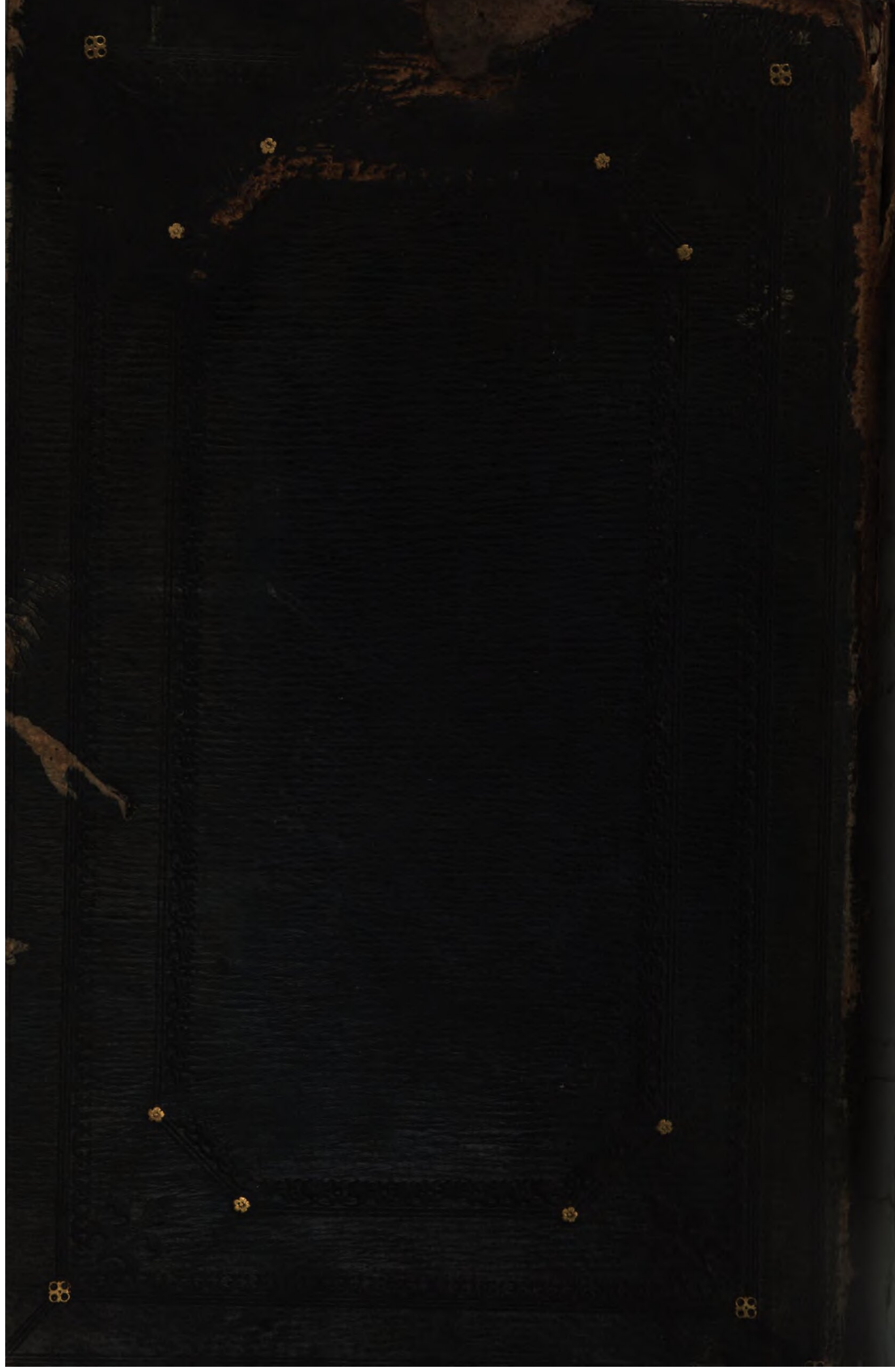
der the dissolute manners of the people, the turbulent spirit of the Prætorian bands, the profligate servility of the Pagan senate, and the enormous oppressions of Pagan emperors?

Is extensive empire, we may ask the objectors, a blessing to the general interests of society? Did the Roman empire, founded as it was upon the violence of conquest, and supported by all the arts of corruption, and all the rigours of despotism, give rise to such a political or a moral condition of the world, that any mind, enlightened by philosophy and softened by benevolence, could seriously wish for its continuance?

To arm the hands of conquerors, or to glut the ambition of kings, made no part of that Teacher's design, whose kingdom was not of this world. It is therefore no solid objection to his religion, that it did not promote those secular interests, with which both the Founder, and the immediate supporters of its pretensions, disclaimed even the slightest connection. But the Gospel, be it remembered, even amidst the convulsions and distractions of the Roman empire, gradually infused juster notions of virtue and piety into the bosoms of individuals. It tamed the savage spirits, and enlightened the understandings, of the barbarians, who reduced the scattered provinces to subjection, and at last pushed their arms to the enfeebled and unresisting Capital. And let it not be forgotten, that from the subversion of this empire arose all the improvements in arts, in science, in civilization, and in government, which are now established in Christian countries, and to which Christianity itself was indirectly instrumental. The Gospel, before the fall of this empire, first spread its influence in private life, and then it put a partial check on the crimes of those who acted on the great theatre of public life. If the fall of the Roman empire was, upon the whole, an evil, Christianity was not the sole or the obvious cause of that evil. If it was eventually a good, we are in-

debted for a share of that good to the just notions of their duty, which the Gospel had implanted in the minds of its professors, and to the powerful motives by which it encouraged them in the prosecution of their true happiness.

THE END.



White, Joseph

A comparison of Mahometism and Christianity in their history, their
evidence and their effects Sermons preached before the University of
Oxford, 1784

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